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WIZARD

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THE COMICS MAGAZINE • 132

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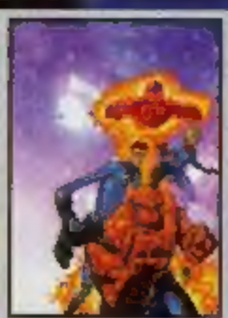

The movie **Wolverine** and **Spider-Man** cover (left) was artfully rendered by Joe Jusko. We took a trip out to Calif.-based Marvel Films for a visit on the sets of "Daredevil," "Hulk" and "X-Men 2" on **page 54**. The **Fantastic Four** cover (right) was penciled by upcoming series artists Mike Wieringo and Karl Kesel, and colored by Hi-Fi Design. We profiled the controversial career of new *Fantastic Four* writer Mark Waid on **page 62**.

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EXCLUSIVE OFFER

COOL STUFF FROM THE MAIL

BATTLE OF THE PLANETS #1/2

Top Cow's revamp of the beloved '80s cartoon continues with this all-new, exclusive #1/2 offer written by series writer Munier Sharrieff that predates the events of the hot-selling issue #1! The head of the U.S. Armed Forces isn't too pleased with the members of G-Force and he'll stop at nothing to discredit them! But whose side is he on anyway? Featuring a new cover by series art director Alex Ross, with interior art by Wilson Tortosa, Shane Law and Udon, this is one comic no *Battle of the Planets* fan can afford to miss! Go to **page 32** to order your copy today!

MAGIC WORDS

BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS, INC... SPIDER-MAN'S ARMPITS... ...AND COMIC GEEK PRIDE!

The comic "Ages" are still a big topic, as are jocks who beat up geeks and comic-based movies. It's all part of the wonderful smorgasbord that is "Magic Words" this month. Dig in! But remember: Health regulations require you to use a clean plate when you come back for seconds.

Dear Wizard,

I'm going to be very bold here and declare that we are now in the fifth age of comics: the Neoclassical Age. The name comes from the neoclassical era of British literature back in the 18th century. Those writers looked back onto the literature of the past for inspiration for their present works. I've noticed a similar thing happening in comics right now.

This Neoclassical Age began in the year 2000 with the publication of *Ultimate Spider-Man* #1. Now, creators are looking back on the great comics of the past and reinvigorating and reinventing them for the future (i.e. the Ultimate line). Everything has almost completely changed. In 2000, the X-Men, Spider-Man and Green Arrow comics were horrible or nonexistent. But now look at those titles, along with many others. Not only are sales up, but superheroes have been rediscovered by Hollywood.

I have no disagreements about any of the other ages—Golden, Silver, Bronze, "Modern"—but how about the "Neoclassical Age"? What do you think?

Greg Thelen
gambit_81@hotmail.com

I think it's a bit oversimplified. In fact, even Marvel President Bill Jemas, the guy that spurred on the "Ultimate" line, would disagree.

"From 1995 to 2000, sales in the comic business dropped from 300 million books per year to under 100 million," he says. Jemas thinks a "neoclassical" approach was the culprit. "Comic creativity was a thing of the past, as creators told stories that fit between the cracks of long-ago stories."

I think you may be mixing two messages here, Greg. Sure, the "Ultimate" books may be new takes on old stuff. But the operative word here is "new." It's also a bit reminiscent of the Silver Age, when publishers dusted off long-forgotten superhero characters. Time, as always, will be the final judge. But I really don't see people eventually looking back on these days as a "Neoclassical Age."

Dear Jim,

I have strong reason to believe that if DC Comics revived the old Charlton Comics characters like Blue Beetle, Captain Atom, Judo Master, The Question and Peacemaker, they would sell really big! Look at the image success of *G.I. Joe* or *Micronauts*! It might be a great idea to modify Blue Beetle's "Bugship" and make it look modern, getting him outta the Silver Age! What do you think!

Carlos R. Hall
hunionjoe@aol.com

I'm willing to bet it would not sell really big. DC tried a bit of a Charlton revival a couple years back with *LAW: Living Assault Weapons*. The mini-series fizzled.

However, one previous Charlton revival did okay for itself.

BUNNY AWARD

LETTER OF THE MONTH

Dear Jim,

If I had to pick the most titillating aspect of *Wizard* #129, it would be the little pinky cop-of-a-feel that Jean Grey gets off of Emma Frost on the cover. Is there something between these two that we should know about? Please don't tell me that it was just an oversight on the part of the artist. Hot rumors have been started with less than this!

Tim Stiles
stilesgd@aol.com

Personally, I think Jean and Emma are "just good friends."

Only cover artist and ladies man Adam Hughes knows for sure. Fortunately for us, he's telling.

"For the record, in MY head, Jean's not so much reaching out as Emma is leaning in too damn close," Hughes says. "It fits their personalities. Emma's the type who'd lean in enough so that her naughty bits were brushing up against you, and then she'd secretly enjoy your discomfort."

Now that sounds like a fun date. Where do I sign up?

Right after DC acquired the Charlton rights, Alan Moore and Dave Gibbons did a series featuring new characters that were takeoffs on the old Charlton guys that wound up doing well. It was a little series called *Watchmen*. You may have heard of it.

***Wizard*,**

I have loved comics for many, many years. In middle school, I had posters of Spider-Man and the Silver Surfer in my locker and wore comic T-shirts all the time. I was (and still am, to be honest) the typical fanboy geek. I suppose it goes without saying that I wasn't too popular in high school. All the comic fans in my school were ridiculed by the popular kids because comics weren't cool.

Now with the "Spider-Man" movie, it's trendy to like comics. When I went to see the movie, I was probably sitting next to someone who, if we had gone to high school together, would have beaten me up for being a comic geek.

The straw that breaks the camel's back is the story in *Wizard* #129's "News and Notes" that Abercrombie & Fitch is now covering comics in their magazine. All the popular kids who mocked us in high school wore their clothes! It's exactly like when the jocks started coming to the punk shows and ruined everything. As soon as something gets trendy, all integrity disappears. Comic books aren't a fad. Comic books are art. That fact seems lost on all the mindless sheep that only do something because it's cool.

Marc Bartsch
Dawson, MI

I dunno. When I was in high school, I happened to like comics, punk rock AND I played on the football team. I got by okay.

Sean Collins, an *A&F Quarterly* editor, got by okay too and keeps on keeping on. "We were covering comics for a long, long time before 'Spider-Man' came out," Collins says. "In high school, we were in the same boat you were—we were comics-reading, punk-listening kids."

To Collins, it's all part of the plan. "I can't think of a better way to sabotage old thought patterns than to take the underground, comics and all, right into the frat house," he says. "If that makes us 'mindless sheep,' well, then 'Baa, baa, baa.'"

And for yet more on this kinda subject...

Dear Jim,

I want to respond to Matthew Nance's *Wizard* #130 letter regarding his fear of being "outed" as an adult comic book fan. As a 30-year-old, I consider comics to be a cool, slightly subversive art form which is currently thriving just underneath the mainstream pop-culture radar. Over the past five-or-so years, a comic renaissance has finally sprouted wings and taken off. This has everything to do with the fact that Madison Avenue has mostly kept its nose out of comics since the industry's financial bubble burst circa 1994.

And the fact that most of the middle class, who would rather watch Disney and live their lives according to Rosie and Oprah, doesn't "get" comics should only reinforce your resolve as a fan instead of dampening it. In one particular moment of delicious irony, my best friend's fiancée, who is an avid Beanie Baby collector, smirked and rolled her eyes at me when I mentioned that I collected comics.

Tim Main
lefgar@peoplepc.com

Fortunately while in high school, I may have liked comics and punk rock and played on the football team, but I did NOT collect Beanie Babies.

True words spoken, my brother-man. Keep the faith.

Dear Jim-Bob-Joe-Whozawhatzits,

I saw the "Spider-Man" movie and was truly impressed. It was what a superhero movie should be.

Afterwards, a friend and I were talking about rumors that proved to be untrue that either Hugh Jackman (as Wolverine) or Ben Affleck

HEY! IT'S PEN PALS...

Like a title? Hate a character? Just have something to say? Then write your favorite comic company and let 'em know what you're thinking. Send your thoughts to the following addresses, but be sure to send your letters in care of a particular book or editor. Power to the people!

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(as Daredevil) would be seen bumping into Peter Parker on the street. It was a cool concept, harkening back to the days when a character would show up in another's comic without it having to be a mega-crossover. Since Marvel is making so many movies now, why didn't they do this?

Hey, on the immediate horizon, we have "Incredible Hulk," "Daredevil," "X-Men 2" and likely a third "Blade" movie. Is there any hope of seeing something like this in any of those upcoming flicks?

Frank Brower
Moline, IL

There's a little hope. But just a little.

Tom DeSanto, co-writer and executive producer of 2000's "X-Men" movie, says it's tough. "Unfortunately, 'Hulk' is at Universal, 'Daredevil' is at Fox and 'Spider-Man' is with Sony," he says. "So while they're all partnered with Marvel Films, different studios have their screen rights. It could happen only if one studio controls two or more characters they can use."

"Crossovers" can also happen in a limited way on DVD. DeSanto oughtta know. "The Spider-Man rumor arose out of the gag 'Easter egg' on our DVD where Spidey walks into an 'X-Men' scene," DeSanto says. "As turnabout being fair play, they were going to dress Hugh Jackman up as Wolverine and have him do a gag bit with Tobey Maguire for the 'Spider-Man' DVD, but timing and schedules just didn't work out."

DeSanto, a rabid comic fan himself, likes this kinda thing: "It's something that can't be done officially, but unofficially, it's a fun way to give the fans something extra.

Dear *Wizard*,

Sometimes Spider-Man is drawn with a small "net" of webbing connecting his elbows to his body. What is this called? Does it have a name?

Ryan Falco
Lake Worth, FL

Kinda-sorta. It's usually just referred to as "underarm webbing." But *Amazing Spider-Man* writer J. Michael Straczynski has gotten a bit more up close and personal with it. He calls it "Fred."

No, really. He does.

Dear Wiz-Bangs,

I have been reading *Ultimate X-Men* since #2 and I'm wondering: Does anyone else have this really creepy feeling about Professor Xavier? Something's just not right about him, and I don't trust him, especially after how he treated his son in #18.

Kris Gamsdaman
gamsdaman@hotmail.com

Your edgy feeling is a calculated one. Calculated by none other than *Ultimate X-Men* scribe Mark Millar. "As a kid, I never really trusted Xavier. The only guys in comics with bald heads tended to be villains, so I always thought he was slightly shifty and this is doubtless where a lot of this comes from," says Millar. There's even a bit more going on than just a prejudice against baldies.

"It's also worth pointing out that Xavier is the leader of a *homo superior* cult whom the human population generally dislike," Millar says. "Our Spider-Sense should be tingling when we see him. We're only human, after all. He's not."

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Dear JM,

Some of my favorite books haven't been out for a long time. What's up with *Violent Messiahs*, *Planetary* and *Danger Girl*?

Azeem Choudhury
Holland, PA

Lo! And behold! *Violent Messiahs: Lamenting Pain* #1, the first issue in the new storyarc in the rather kick-ass Image Comics series, will be on stands in September.

On the *Planetary* front, writer Warren Ellis has cranked out some new scripts that await artist John Cassaday to take a break from *Captain America*.

And J. Scott Campbell, who just finished *ThunderCats* #0, has set *Danger Girl* on the shelf for a bit while he works on his next and still-secret (Shhhh!) project.

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QUICK HITS

"What weapon was used on Wolverine on the *Wizard* #130 cover? How did bullets get embedded in him, shell casings and all? Maybe someone just threw the bullets at him really, really hard."

—Kyle Martin, Mesa, AZ

"Hey, I just realized: After years of complaining that the Spider-Man books were no damn good, they're suddenly... good!"

—Sarah Craft, Santa Fe Springs, CA

"I knew there was a reason I loved George Pérez's art. Upon seeing the JLA/Avengers 'First Look,' [*Wizard* #130], I remembered what it was."

—Wallace Larson, Biwabik, MN

"The *Avengers* #57 preview [*Wizard* #130] just blew me away! I am so looking forward to this book again!"

—Adam Landers, Melbourne, FL

"Jim Lee drawing Batman is a GREAT idea, as his sketchbook [*Wizard* #130] shows. Only question: Why did it take five years to get to this stunning conclusion?"

—Johnny Barnett, Elmira, NY

"I never even heard of Battle of the Planets until your *Wizard* #130 preview. But the art looks great! I'll definitely check it out now."

—Bob Bailey, Montreal, Quebec, Canada

"If this '80s trend—G.I. Joe, Transformers, Micronauts and ThunderCats comics—continues, I'm looking into the Smurfs comic rights."

—Demarcus Donovan, Atlanta, GA

"Show more pictures of Jennifer Connolly (below) like you did in *Wizard* #130 and I'll renew my subscription for 10 years. Thanks."

—Sammy Benton, Las Vegas, NV

JENNIFER CONNELLY

"You have an INCREDIBLE Alex Ross piece featuring the best of Alan Moore's characters [*Wizard* #130] and you *don't* use it as a cover? At least tell me you're doing a poster of it!"

—Michael Weyer, Oakbrook, IL

"Holy genetics, Batman! Alan Moore's daughter is now writing comics? If there's anything to heredity, I'm certainly looking forward to her stories."

—Adam Colbrunn, Nahsua, NH

"I like Kevin Smith as much as the next fanboy. But after seeing the art, I think Terry Dodson might be the real star of *Spider-Man/Black Cat*."

—Rodney Grieger, Saint Louis, MO

Wizard,

I'm very excited about *Peter Parker: Spider-Man* #44. I have dreamed of the day when Humberto Ramos would draw entire Spidey issues, not just the covers! Will we see more of Humberto's Spider-Man after his four-issue arc?

Oscar Orozco
San Pedro, CA

Maybe, maybe not.

"Right now, we're talking about a larger commitment on *Peter Parker: Spider-Man*, but it's not a done deal yet," Ramos says. The artist will definitely do #44-#47, but he will not continue as the *Peter Parker* cover artist after that. He'll return to his Cliffhanger title, *Out There*, full time. At least for a while.

"For my part, I'd love to do more Spider-Man," he says. "They said they're happy with me, and I'm happy working with them. It's up to Marvel right now."

Dear Jim,

I think Brian Michael Bendis is not one person, but a conglomerate of persons who team up to write the best comic book stories each month. I mean, come on: *Alias*, *Ultimate Spider-Man*, *Powers* and *Daredevil*? No way one guy writes them all.

And I picked up an issue of *Tom Strong's Terrific Tales*. Art Adams' artwork is unbelievable! I've never seen anything like it!

Corey Thomas
Jersey Shore, PA

What the hell is the Jersey Shore doing in Pennsylvania?

By the way, you forgot to mention Bendis' role as a writer and executive producer for the "Spider-Man" cartoon as well. Such a workload seems to be starting to addle Bendis' brain. "You know what?" Bendis asks. "I think I might have to be Greg Rucka too, to get all this work done."

And you are absolutely right—the force of nature men call Art Adams truly is a wonder to behold on the "Jonni Future" stories in *Tom Strong's Terrific Tales*. The hyper-detailed pages take two to three days each for Adams to crank out, but they're worth every last second.

Dear Jim,

I am an aspiring comic book artist who recently graduated from the Hartford Art School with a BFA in illustration. I am skilled in all the traditional 2-D media, as well as in Photoshop and Illustrator, and in 3-D media. Can you give me any tips and/or pointers on how to break into the comic business, or people that I could contact?

For my senior project, I did a five-page book that I wrote, designed, and did all the artwork for, and I was hoping to use for submissions, but have been having a few problems. It is a fully painted book done in a mixture of techniques that creates a style that I would definitely call my own. The few companies I have contacted do not even want to see this book because it is a painted book and because it is original material. If I had my way, I would love to do a book in this style, as I feel there is nothing out there today that is like it.

But I would love to just work in comics, be that as a penciler, inker, painter, cover artist, anything. Any insight or advice?

Chad Turner
Claremont, NH

Simple advice: Contact Robb Horan, publisher at Sirius Entertainment. "It's typical what this guy is getting," Horan says. "Marvel and DC aren't interested in original material. They're interested in seeing some X-Men and

LETTER ART

The mega-talented creator of this month's best envelope takes home a *JLA: Divided We Fall* trade paperback, courtesy of DC Comics! Those guys at DC are so cool for donating their stuff, we owe them bigger than Snapper Carr owes the JLA for putting up with his annoying butt! Artists: Please include a clearly printed return address and a list of characters depicted on the back of the envelope.

ENVELOPE OF THE MONTH.....THE PRIZE

THE THING, Clark Stepp, Blue Ridge, GA

JOHNNY THE HOMOCIDAL MANIAC, Justin Wilcox, Cortland, NY

POWERPUFF VAMPIRES, Karl Antonio Leonardo de Campos, Brazil

You got Something to say? Say it to my face!
I'll say it to your ass, after I vomit!
Heeeee!
Stop it, all of you! You're ruining my birthday party!

MASTERS OF THE UNIVERSE, James Stayte, Evesham Worcs, England

Batman tests. I'd love to see what this guy has done. I want the book that isn't Batman or X-Men. We take submissions like that." And they take them at: Sirius Entertainment, 196 Main St., Andover, NJ 07821. Hi, ho, mail away!

Oh, yeah—more simple advice, again from Horan: "Clearly, if you're willing to do anything, then do everything. Do some pencil work, ink work, color work and separate it out. Show that to all the editors from a Marvel or DC. You might get work that way."

What's Crackin', Jimmy,

I'm a longtime reader of *Wizard*, as are my fellow comic geek convicts incarcerated here at Moose Lake Correctional Facility. We would like to extend our thanks for such a well-done and informative mag. Through *Wizard*, we are able to remain current on all things comic.

As such, me and the boys have decided to make you, Jim, an honorary convict. With this title comes great power and great responsibility, mainly an overmuscular wrist and the ability to sustain yourself on Ramen noodles for months on end.

You can thank me later, "Jimmy G." In fact, I'll be seeing you August 25, 2003. Maybe earlier with good behavior.

Josh Fay, #207847
Moose Lake
Correctional Facility
Moose Lake, MN

Gee. An honorary cellie. Couldn't you have just sent a muffin basket?

That's that. I gotta run down to the courthouse and get on of them "temporary restraining orders." Until next month, I remain...

—Jim McLauchlin

When they call him "crotchety," Jim McLauchlin just looks down on his package with pride.

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RUNNIN' WITH THE DEVIL

Kevin Smith returns to 'Daredevil' and ties it to movie

It takes a lot to get a villain into a comic book these days: There's costume changes, finding an artist, and pushing Brian Michael Bendis out of the way.

Those are just some of the elements that went into the making of *Daredevil: The Target* a four-issue Marvel Knights mini-series that hits this November. Kevin Smith, who relaunched *DD* under the Marvel Knights banner in 1998 with the critically acclaimed and sales-smashing "Guardian Devil" storyline, makes a triumphant return to the character as writer, while *Preacher* veteran Glenn Fabry pencils, inks and paints covers.

At the core of the story is one very simple concept: "DD and Bullseye face off for the first time since Bullseye killed Karen in 'Guardian Devil,'" said Smith, referring to DD love interest Karen Page. "The Kingpin is usually thought of as DD's archnemesis, but their relationship is largely an ongoing chess match, not based on physical confrontations. Bullseye, however, is sort of DD's equal in combat, so when I think of two guys in tights beating the sh-- out of one another, I think of them."

There's a little more than just beatings going on that get Bullseye into the action, however.

"There's a post-9/11 terrorism plot that Bullseye is involved in that leads him back to New York and leads him to cross paths with Daredevil," said Editor Stuart Moore. "Of course, the history with Bullseye and Karen is what Daredevil will focus on."

Readers will have something else to focus on—a new look for Bullseye that reflects Marvel's much more conscious effort to connect comics to their movie properties. February 2003's "Daredevil" movie will feature Bullseye as a main bad guy, and a change in costume to match the movie is in order.

"It may be off-putting to some at first," he admitted, "but trust me—it'll make sense by the end of the series."

Finding the right artist was a bit jarring in itself. Joe Quesada drew "Guardian Devil," and was supposed to draw this series. But that's before Quesada was promoted to Marvel editor-in-chief.

"Now that Joe's the E-I-C, getting him to sit down and focus on something more than a cover or a half-issue story is almost impossible," Smith said. "He said he'd be glad to draw it, but the first ish wouldn't be finished for two years or so. And since the mandate is to get Bullseye back into the Marvel Universe in time for the release of the 'Daredevil' movie, that was out of the question."

Fortunately, an able replacement

BULL FIGHT Will Daredevil get revenge on Bullseye for killing Karen Page? Find out in the four-issue *Daredevil: The Target* mini-series.

ON TARGET Bullseye's new costume reflects the mood and look of the upcoming "Daredevil" movie.

was right at hand. "The story's darker than 'Guardian Devil,' so we were looking for someone who could convey that," Smith said. "Stuart showed me some pencils Glenn Fabry had been doing for other books, and having been a fan of his *Preacher* covers, I loved what I saw. We inked him immediately."

All that remained was making sure an old promise was kept—Quesada's guarantee that Daredevil and Bullseye wouldn't face off again unless Smith was the one to write the rematch. Quesada's promotion and Smith's 18-issue run on DC Comics' *Green Arrow* created other commitments that almost led to the parties forgetting about that. Almost.

"Last December, word had come down that [current *Daredevil* writer Brian Michael] Bendis was planning to end a storyarc with a Bullseye/DD face-off," Smith recalled. "I reminded Joe of his promise, and Joe said he'd tell Brian to go another way with a different villain, so long as I promised to turn in a DD/Bullseye book before the release of the flick."

The promise turned out to be strong motivation.

"I turned in the first script the following week," laughed Smith, who had been plagued by lateness in his previous comic work. "Hated to mess with Bendis' story, but I had to be the first guy to pair those two up again after 'Guardian.'" ■ JIM MCLAUCHLIN

KEVIN HELPS US

CAST—WELCOMES—COMIC

News of Kevin Smith's Daredevil return is undoubtedly big in the comic business. It was also quite the buzz on a certain movie set.

The cast and crew of 20th Century Fox's "Daredevil" movie got word about the new series just before midnight on June 6, while shooting an exterior scene under the 6th Street Bridge in Los Angeles. Smith's good buddy (and "Daredevil" star) Ben Affleck didn't know it was coming, even though Smith had visited the set just two nights before.

"He's doing another one?" Affleck asked. "Good for him. I'm looking forward to it. I'll buy it. Daredevil's been my favorite comic book character since I was maybe 13 or 14 years old."

"Daredevil" writer/director Mark Steven Johnson had the upper hand on Affleck, as he was privy to the series, and even knows the twist ending. He's also rather looking forward to it.

"C'mon. You have to ask? I'm dying to see it," he said. "So much of this movie was taken right out of the books Kevin and Joe Quesada did. I'm a huge fan. I can't wait."

Smith and Johnson have become buddies during filming. "He's been our 'fifth Beatle' in this," Johnson said. "He comes by, hangs out, and I ask him all kinds of questions."

And while Affleck wrote an intro for the previous "Guardian Devil" collection, that honor may fall to another when *Daredevil: The Target* gets collected. "Mark Steven Johnson would be the more logical choice," Smith said. "I mean, what's Affleck gonna say that he didn't already except, 'I played Daredevil! Me! I'm the Daredevil-man! Whoooopeeeeee!' Please." ■ JM

SMITH

BEN AFFLECK AS DAREDEVIL

THE BUZZBIN

BARNES AND COMICS With the hype over comics growing at a fevered pace every day, the Barnes & Noble book franchise is reportedly looking at beginning a chain of comic book stores over the next 18 months.

DISAPPEARING INK Yet more books are foregoing the inking process. The latest to jump the black ink ship? Michael Turner's *Fathom*. Turner pencils very tightly to start with, and works very closely with colorist Peter Steigerwald, so inks are almost redundant. Inkers are becoming more of an endangered species.

'PINKY,' INDEED! On a recent radio interview, Marvel Comics founding father Stan Lee referred to Sgt. Fury and His Howling Commandos as having "a gay soldier." When pressed for details, Stan revealed that Percival Pinkerton was gay. "We didn't really play it up," he said. "But you could kind of guess."

'AUTHORITY' FIGURES While nothing has been confirmed yet, sources at WildStorm say they are close to announcing a new writer for an *Authority* revamp. In the running are Peter Milligan (*X-Statix*), Micah Ian Wright (*Starmen/Hatch*) and Robbie Morrison (*2000 AD*).

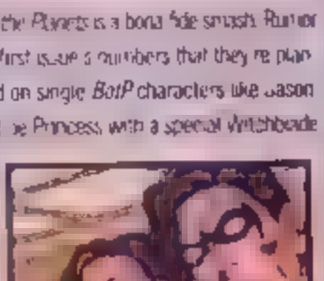
KNIGHT MOVES First Daredevil, then Captain America. Mark well these words. Come 2003, yet another long- (and we mean long) standing Marvel character will make the jump to Marvel Knights. Better get the wet bar ready.

REVAMPS LIKE LIGHTNING! Word is Marvel is looking to duplicate its *X-Force* success by totally reworking another title with all-new characters and an all-new concept. That title? *Thunderbolts*, featuring stories by writer John Arcudi (*Doom Patrol*).

ARTIST'S ARTIST DC has plans to publish a series of one-shots done by artists who normally only work on covers, such as Adam Hughes and Dave Johnson. Each one-shot will contain a series of short stories starring various DC characters of the artist's choosing.

WINNING BATTLE Axel Rose. *Battle of the Planets* is a bona fide smash. Rumor has it that Top Cow is so pleased with the first issue's numbers that they're planning to release a series of one-shots based on single *BotP* characters like Jason Mark and Princess, the first of which could be Princess with a special Witchblade guest appearance.

CLASH OF THE TITANS! Rumor has it that big changes are in store for DC's Titans, including the death of a character, a new team name and a new writer in Geoff Johns (*The Flash, JSA, Hawkman*).



THE DOCTOR IS IN After his ominous appearance in *Amazing Spider-Man* #41-#42, rumor has it that Dr. Strange will get his very own mini-series sometime in 2003, written by Spidey scribe J. Michael Straczynski. Reportedly, the mini- will focus on the "appointment with Death" that Strange refers to in his *Amazing* appearance.

RIDING THE DREAMWAVE Dreamwave superstar Pat Lee refers to his follow-up to the wildly successful *Transformers: Generation One* mini-series as "Gundam meets Vietnam." The three-issue mini-series follows a mech-piloting soldiers who find out that there's more than meets the eye while on a P.O.W. rescue mission. In other news, Lee is also rumored to be in the running for a *Star Wars* one-shot in 2003.

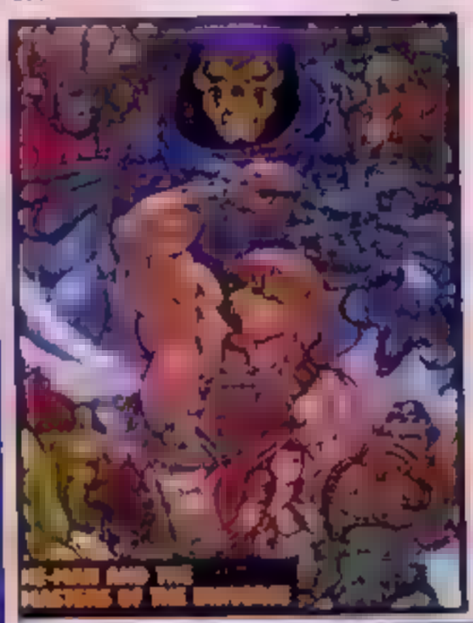
ROBO-STORM? Sources close to WildStorm/DC say the publisher is putting the final touches on a contract that would give them the license to the wildly popular '80s manga, Robotech.

HE-MAN COMIC LANDS AT IMAGE

He may be the most powerful man in the universe, but can even the mighty He-Man go toe to toe with G.I. Joe, the Transformers and the ThunderCats? Fans may soon find out. Mattel has granted non-exclusive rights to MV Creations to produce comics based on the '80s buffest barbarian.

Written by MV Creations President Val Staples with art by newcomer Emiliano Santalucia, the Image book is slated for a November release. The chance to pen the action figure icon is a dream come true for long-time fan Staples, owner of **www.he-man.org**, the Web's largest He-Man fansite.

"I never abandoned He-Man," chuckled the Virginia-based creator. "I'm ecstatic to be doing this."



He-Man's crusade to defend Eternia from the evil Skeletor was a pop culture tour de force that spilled over into a popular cartoon series, comic books, a live-action movie and countless collectibles.

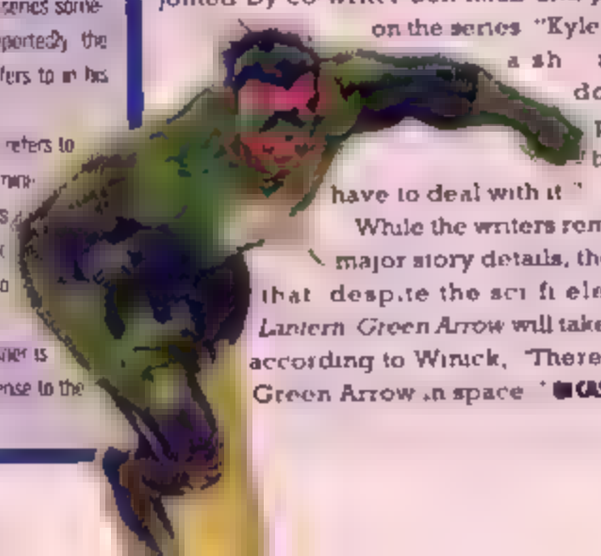
The new Image series is the latest addition to a full-scale multi-media invasion which includes an all-new toy line, animated series on Cartoon Network and more merchandise. ■ JMD

ROLLIN' IN THE GREEN

They say green is the color of friendship—too bad no one ever told Ollie Queen and Kyle Rayner that!

Green Lantern/Green Arrow, a six-issue mini-series which ships in late 2002, follows the adventures of Kyle Rayner and Ollie Queen taking down a syndicate of intergalactic drug dealers. Yet despite the fact the two must join forces to save the planet from alien pushers, it certainly doesn't mean they have to get along during the process.

"Ollie just does not like Kyle since his best friend was [Hal Jordan], and here's this younger guy walking around in his clothes," stressed series writer Judd Winick, who will be joined by co-writer Ben Raab and penciler Charlie Adlard on the series. "Kyle's attitude is, I could give a sh- if this old superhero doesn't like me. I've proved myself a hundred times over and he'll just have to deal with it."



While the writers remained tight-lipped about major story details, they are quick to point out that, despite the sci-fi elements, none of *Green Lantern/Green Arrow* will take place in space because, according to Winick, "There's nothing stupider than Green Arrow in space." ■ CASEY SELMS

STRACZYNSKI MILKS FINAL 'DREAM'

J. Michael Straczynski has one final Dream before he says good night.

The acclaimed writer, who recently signed an exclusive contract with Marvel Comics, will roll out *Dream Police* in January 2003 as the final book in his "Joe's Comics" line at Top Cow Productions. Gary Frank, who partnered with Straczynski on the *Midnight Nation* mini-series, will handle art chores for the 22-page one-shot.

"It was one of those concepts that sorta came with the title," Straczynski said. "If we accept that dreams are perhaps an alternate reality, or that there are consistent rules to them, then who enforces those rules? Who makes sure the right people get the right dreams, and, who makes sure that the dreams themselves don't get out of control?"

The answer: The Dream Police, a "Dragnet"-type pair of somnambulant cops. And if Neil Gaiman's acclaimed *Sandman* series showed the solemn side of dreams...then these two are the Anti-Sandman. "Neil's *Sandman* books are a terrific, serious approach, so I figured, let's go the other way and do it for the humor of it," Straczynski said. "It came out a deranged, funny, off-beat book."

And though the Top Cow chapter is closing, Joe's Comics may live on. "Top Cow has indicated it's willing to sell me back the Joe's Comics imprint and logo, so I'm sure it'll show up elsewhere in time," Straczynski said. ■ JIM MCLAUCHLIN

ANDY SMITH FEELS SAFE ON 'FIRST'

You never forget your first. Or rather, *The First*.

Andy Smith remembers his first. His first position with CrossGen Comics was as inker on *The First*, and as of this November's issue #25, he'll return to take on the mantle of penciler.

The First chronicles the political intrigues and epic clashes of two opposing houses of godlike beings. Persha, Ingra's daughter, wants to reunite the two opposing houses of the First. Ingra, leader of House Sinister, wants to reunite the houses as well—under her absolute rule.

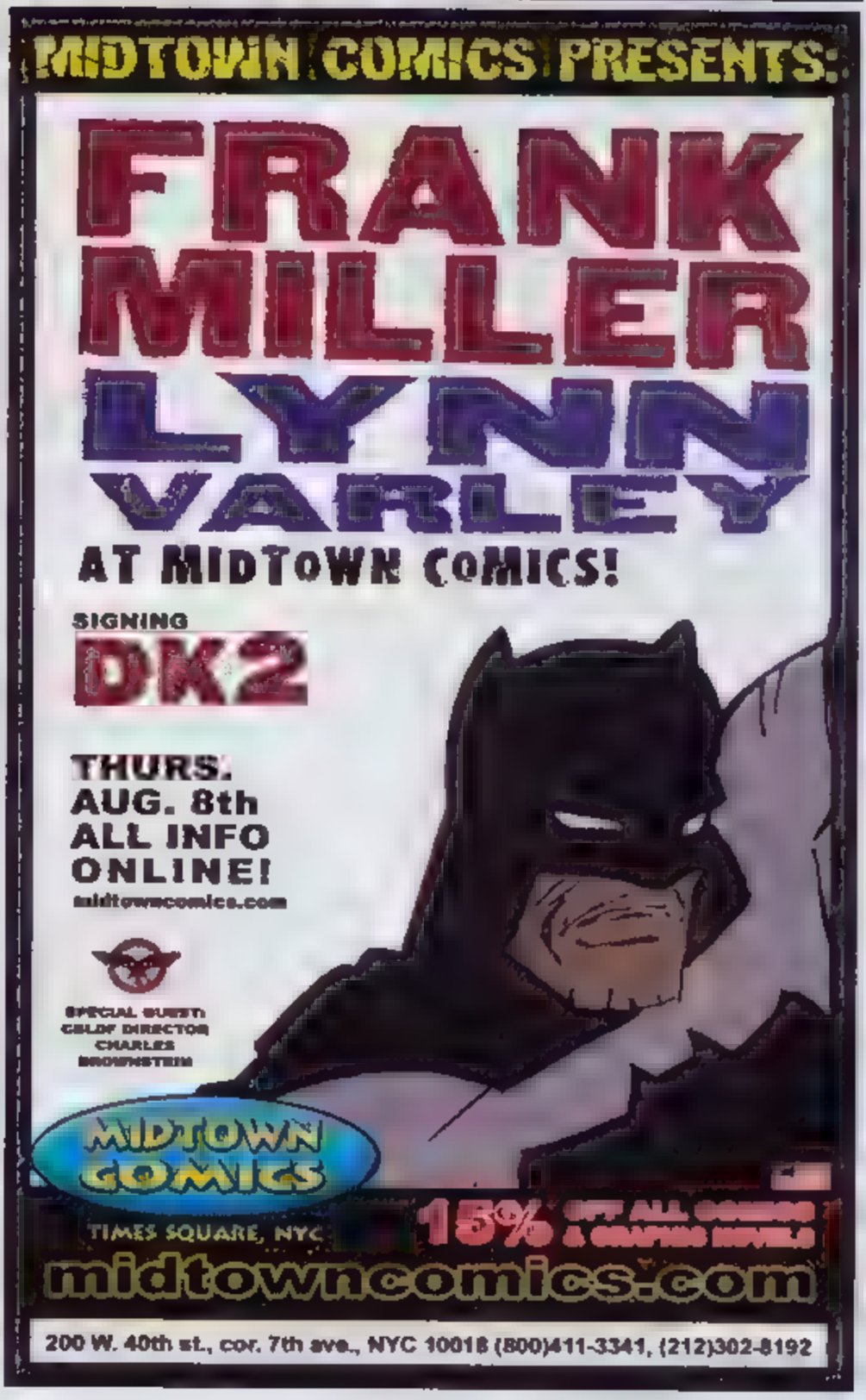
By the way, Ingra's still madly in love with Pyrem, Persha's father and House Dexter's leader. But that doesn't stop Ingra from recruiting Seahn of Dexter to help stage a coup. Seahn double-crosses her with the help of Braag, whom everyone thinks is Persha's father, but who is actually Seahn's. Of course, Seahn believes Treun the Hunter is his father.

If the political stuff bores you, don't worry; the characters also kick ass and take names. Think "Days of Our Lives" on Mount Olympus meets "Celebrity Deathmatch."

"I'm really looking forward to it," said Smith. "I like doing high-adventure action stories, and hopefully, if Barbara Kesel keeps writing the way she's been writing, that's what I'll get to do."

Smith has big changes planned for the coolest gods since Thor and his Asgard buddies, starting with the monarchs' dress code

■ KAITLIN ROSENBERRY



OSBOURNE VS. OSBORN

When it comes to being a rock superstar like Ozzy Osbourne or an off-your-rocker supervillain like Norman Osborn (a.k.a. the Green Goblin), the choice seems pretty clear... or is it? Here's a little comparison.

NORMAN OSBORN

Norman Osborn's chemical experiments made him into the Green Goblin.

Norman Osborn drives Spider-Man batty.

Norman Osborn may one day face Iron Man.

Norman Osborn rides a metal glider.

Norman Osborn is a paranoid schizophrenic.

Norman Osborn's son is bananas.

Norman Osborn drops pumpkin bombs

OZZY OSBOURNE

Ozzy Osbourne's chemical experiments makes him see little green goblins.

Ozzy Osbourne bites the heads of bats.

Ozzy Osbourne may one day remember the words to "Iron Man."

Ozzy Osbourne used to ride his metal fans.

Ditto.

Ozzy Osbourne's hid his son's knife under bananas.

Ozzy Osbourne drops "F" bombs.

IDENTITY CRISIS

Superman's secret is put to the test in 4-title crossover

Clark Kent has always been known as a mild-mannered reporter for a great metropolitan newspaper

However, come September, he's going to have to drop the "mild-mannered" part of that description if he's going to save his friends and family

Old Smallville is put to the ultimate test in September's "Superman: Ending Battle," an eight-part crossover which will run through all four Superman titles beginning with September's *Superman* #186. In "Ending Battle," a host of both classic and current Superman villains decide to give Big Blue a break and instead go after his alter ego. Yet rather than attack Kent, they're hitting him where it hurts—his closest friends, family, and pretty much anyone he's ever met.

"In chapter two, we see various people in Clark Kent's life we've never seen before—his accountant, his dentist, his high school football coach and many more," explained *Adventures of Superman* writer Joe Casey. "All of whom become targets in this attack on Superman's life."

"Ending Battle" will not only include current villains such as Bizarro, but also re-introduces several classic villains, such as the Atomic Skull and Terra Man. Geoff Johns, who writes two issues, will bring back Neutron and Terra Man.

"Superman is bigger than any costumed super-villain you could throw at him, and with this storyline, we're gonna prove it," said Casey. ■ CASEY SELMAS

ROLL OUT THE WELCOME MATT

When it comes to comics, Matt Wagner must have one thought in mind: go big or go home.

That's certainly the case for two upcoming projects that will once again remind fans why he's one of the comics industry's most talented creators. First up, *Grendel: Red, White & Black* which hits stands in September, serves as a follow-up to 1998's wildly popular mini-series starring Wagner's signature creation.

"It was great seeing so many different artists with so many different interpretations of my character that I've been drawing since I was a kid," Wagner said.

While each issue of the four issue mini-series contains five Grendel stories, the real draw of *Red, White & Black* is that, unlike other Grendel stories in which Wagner writes and draws, he'll get a little help art-wise. Contributing art to the new series will be Darick Robertson, Stan Sakai, Ashley Wood, Jim Mahfood, Brian Michael Bendis and many more.

After *Red, White & Black*, Wagner fans can look forward to an as-yet-unnamed JLA project starring Superman, Batman and Wonder Woman which ships later this year.

"It's a three-issue mini-series that tells the story about how Batman and Superman first meet Wonder Woman," explained Wagner. "In stories like Dark Knight and Kingdom Come, they tend to focus on the end of these characters' careers when their relationships are almost over-developed. I kind of want to go back to the point when it was just beginning, and specifically a time when Batman and Superman weren't at odds with each other."

HEAT INDEX

No one loves comics like *Wizard* and here are some cool things we read or saw this month.

HIGH ROADS (DC/Cliffhanger) Hats off to Scott Lobdell for taking everything we love about the Indiana Jones movies (observable action, hilarious dialogue and sultry vixens) and putting it into *High Roads*. Add in the phenomenal artwork of Leinil Yu, and it's really no wonder why we've loved every issue of this mini-series.

SPIDER-MAN: BLUE #2 (Marvel Knights) Nobody has cornered the "retro" market like Jeph Loeb and Tim Sale, telling yesterday's stories stronger than most current ones. Loeb not only serves up a cool Atomic Knight, but also gives us a good belly laugh courtesy of J. Jonah Jameson's crotchety tude. Sale's awesome art looks like Steve Ditko on steroids, with detailed backgrounds, dynamic angles and deft body language.

THE CALL #1 (Marvel Comics) Never mind the hype. The intensity of this book thrusts readers into a blazing inferno, both physically and emotionally. In Chuck Austen and Bruce Jones' story, the true superpowers are that of raw courage. In the opening sequence, you'll find yourself watching the backs of a top-notch firefighters turning off their fear switch to rescue lives.

THING: FREAKSHOW #1 (Marvel Comics) Writer Geoff Johns and artist Scott Kolins have worked their magic on the Fantastic Four's powerhouse in this mini-series. Ever wonder what it's like to be feared by the public, and ignored by fans and the press? *Freakshow* (left) provides a touching look at what makes Ben Grimm tick, and it's a look under his hide you've never seen before!

ALIAS #10 (Marvel MAX) Writer Brian Michael Bendis crafts some of the funniest dialogue we've ever read in this ish, and his focal point is the profane publisher of the *Daily Bugle*, J. Jonah Jameson. In this story, Jameson hires P.I. Jessica Jones to follow Spider-Man and unmask him. When Jones wastes thousands of dollars on a wild goose chase, where she's actually helping the homeless, treating AIDS patients and reading to the blind, Jameson flips out and unleashes a profanity-laced tirade that had us in stitches! If only every J.J.J. appearance could take place in a MAX book.

END OF THE LINE FOR LARA?

Croft's death kicks off Top Cow's 'End Game' event this October

Top Cow is prepping a tomb for the Tomb Raider

This October, the buxom adventurer's demise will kick off Top Cow's highly anticipated "End Game" crossover Originally scheduled to close the three-part event, *Tomb Raider* #25 sets the stage, then continues in *Witchblade* #60 before wrapping up with Marc Silvestri's one-shot *Evo*

The story unfolds when Witchblade wielder/New York City detective Sara Pezzini calls in Lara Croft after an ancient supernatural element begins to manifest itself during her latest investigation While trying to get to the bottom of this mystery an unwitting Lara finds herself possessed Now under the control of a sinister otherworldly force, the spelunking sex kitten lets loose on a no holds barred rampage.

Will Lara Croft be taking the permanent dirtnap by the conclusion of "End Game"?

Lara gets infected with this thing while she's trying to figure out how to stop it " explained Top Cow Editor In Chief David Wohl. "It's a sort of virus that takes control of Lara and forces her to do bad things—very bad things. She will kill."

And just what it is exactly that's making our lovely heroine do such horrible things is a cat that Top Cow doesn't plan on letting out of the bag just yet

"It's a *big* surprise," teased Wohl. "It's going through a lot of people at once and keeps spreading from person to person. It's an entity, a part of a greater being that's an ancient enemy of the Witchblade."

The landmark issue also marks the return of superstar artist Mike Turner (*Fathom*), an avid player of the *Tomb Raider* video games

While tight lipped about Lara's future, Wohl insisted that the show would go on whether Lara's in the driver's seat or not

' [Lara's] out of the picture for the foreseeable future " explained Wohl. "But there will definitely be an issue #26 Don't be surprised if there's a name other than Lara Croft over the Tomb Raider logo '

■ JMcD

DEATH AND EVIL WALK HAND IN HAND

She broke his heart, now he's ready to break her neck

After several years apart, Chaos! icons Evil Ernie and Lady Death are set to rekindle some supernatural sparks in this November's tentatively titled *Evil Ernie/Lady Death: Dark Passage*. This one-shot, courtesy of Lady Death creator Brian Pulido and artist Romano Molenaar *(Purgatori: God Killer)*, marks the first meeting of the two since the events of 1999's "Armageddon" crossover.

The story unfolds when Ernie tracks down Lady Death after discovering that she's still alive. And though the Evil One still has a bit of a love jones for the Mistress of Mortality, he's got his mind set on a lot more than the nookie.

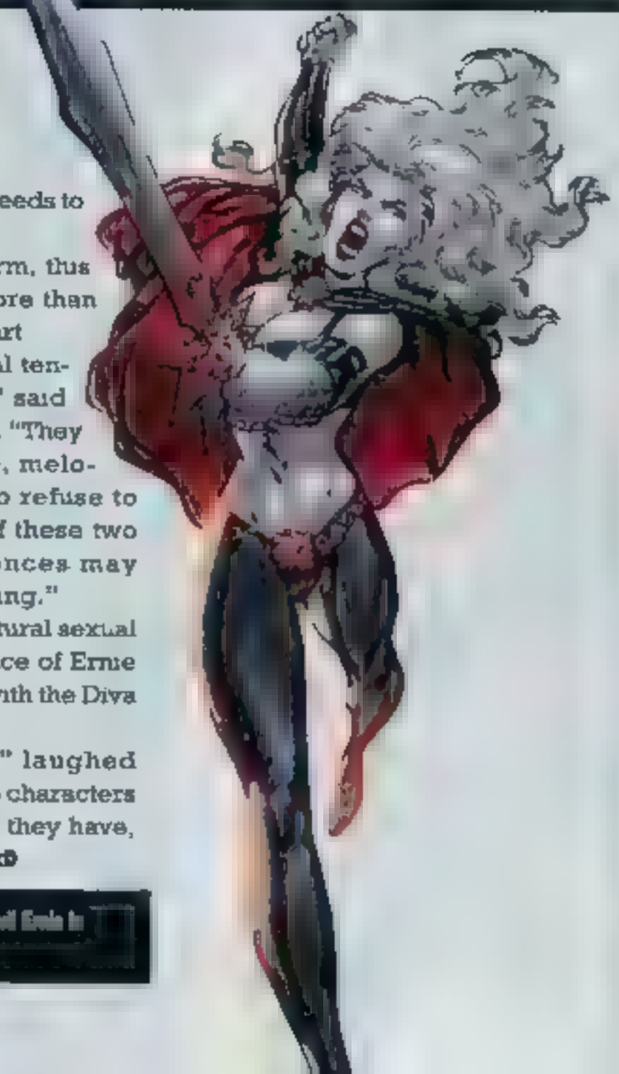
'Ernie's looking for answers," explained Pulido. "Was he a pawn or not? Did Lady Death ever really care or did she just manipulate him? It's something that's been eating Ernie up. It's something that he needs to find out."

And true to Chaos! form, this reunion will consist of more than your standard heart to heart

"There's a lot of sexual tension between these two," said the Arizona-based creator. "They are two very passionate, melodramatic characters who refuse to budge. So, any chance of these two resolving their differences may involve a little roughhousing."

So with all this supernatural sexual tension, is there any chance of Ernie finally gettin' his freak on with the Diva of Death?

"I can't count it out," laughed Pulido. "When you get two characters with the kind of chemistry they have, *anything* is possible." ■ JMcD



Lady Death lays into Evil Ernie in November's *Dark Passage* one-shot.

d·t.comics

COOL COMICS RELATED STUFF ON THE INTERNET

SITE OF THE MONTH

GOTHAM GIRLS

http://www.gothamgirls.com

This month, DC releases the first issue of Gotham Girls, a five-part mini-series starring the women of Gotham City: Batgirl, Harley Quinn, Poison Ivy, Catwoman and Detective Renee Montoya. To tie into that, you can check out the WB online Web 'toon, also called "Gotham Girls," which spawned the comic's release. Watch cartoons, play games and read fun facts about your favorite Gotham heroines and villainesses.

AUGUST

1 Today begins the four-day frenzy that is the San Diego Comic Con, featuring more comic guests than you can shake a stick at. Official site [illegible]

12 Impose Studios, a new independent publisher, hosts their first online Comics Against Cancer Auction today, featuring original art from Cully Hamner, Adam Hughes, Brian Stelfreeze and Karl Story. Proceeds go to the Aflack Children's Cancer Center in Atlanta. Log on to bid at www.impulsestudios2002.org

14 *Liberty Meadows #27* [illegible] Renowned indie artist Frank Cho brings his riotous comic strip to Image. In this ish, Brandy and the boys hit a comic convention! Official site: www.libertymeadows.com

21 *ThunderCats #1* (WildStorm/DC): Lion-O and the rest of the litter return in this five-issue mini-series. Funny ThunderCats movie parody site: www.brutesquad.com/Movies/Thundercats/ Also, new writer Chuck Austen jumps on *Uncanny X-Men* with issue #411, on sale today. Official "X-Men 2" movie site: www.[illegible].com

28 *Fantastic Four (vol. 3) #60* [illegible] only nine friggin' cents! And with Mark Waid and Mike Wieringo jumping on, you have NO excuse not to buy this. Cool FF site: www.ffplaza.com

GUILTY PLEASURE OF THE MONTH

[illegible]

BEAUTY OF "LIBERTY MEADOWS"

NEW ENCYCLOPEDIA DEFINES MARVEL U.

Like paychecks, gifts and ice cream sundaes, with comics, bigger is better.

Marvel's finally giving the fans what they want with *The Marvel Encyclopedia*, a 240-page oversized hardcover guide to the Marvel Universe, replacing the old *Official Guide to the Marvel Universe* comic mini-series.

Marvel decided to publish the encyclopedia as an oversized hardcover after seeing fans fight to get hardcovers such as *Daredevil: Yellow*. The book will be on sale for $29.99 on Oct. 30, with a painted, wraparound cover by Alex Ross.

"It's a big, classic shot of all the best-known Marvel heroes and villains charging right at you," said Bill Rosemann, Marvel's marketing communications manager. "We're going to sell a poster of the cover in September because it's gorgeous!"

Marvel used a rigorous set of criteria to select the characters to go in the encyclopedia.

"We put every character's name on a slip of paper and pulled them out of a hat," joked Assistant Managing Editor Mark Beazley. "It's a shame about Wolverine not being in the book, but Quasar fans rejoice!"

All kidding aside, look for the Avengers, the X-Men, the Fantastic Four, Spider-Man, the Hulk, and yes, Wolverine and more to be in the encyclopedia. Lesser-known characters such as Quasar and Sleepwalker may be in subsequent volumes, said Rosemann. Full-color art swiped from pre-existing books will accompany each biography.

"We really have too many great pieces of art to choose from," said Collections Editor Jeff Youngquist. "Remember those boring three-view shots in the spiral-bound version of the *Handbook*? You won't see anything like that in the *Encyclopedia*."

A new feature of this book will be a power grid for each entry, rating each character in terms of traits such as strength and invulnerability. Readers will finally have answers to immortal questions like who in the Marvel Universe could kick the crap out of the Hulk. ■ CH

COOL STUFF: The new 240-page *Marvel Encyclopedia* will feature power grids for your favorite characters.

LAST MAN STANDING

comic battles you never thought you'd see

LION-O VS. HE-MAN

THE COMBATANTS

6'3"	HEIGHT	6'4"
215lbs	WEIGHT	230lbs
75"	REACH	76"
Sword of Omens	WEAPON OF CHOICE	Sword of Power
Don King	MANAGEMENT INSPIRATION	Little Dutch Boy

Origins... Lion-O led a small band of survivors from the doomed planet Thundera to Third Earth. There, he and the other ThunderCats built a new home, where they battle against Mumm-Ra and the forces of evil!

The royal son of an Eternian and an Earthling, Prince Adam gained the immense power of He-Man on his 18th birthday, powers which he uses to protect Eternia and Castle Greyskull from the evil tyrant Skeletor!

The battle... As part of a plot to take over Eternia, Skeletor sends He-Man to a planet called Third Earth – and right into the ThunderCats' HQ! Lion-O uses his super-agility to stay out of He-Man's reach, all the while attacking with his razor-sharp claws. After inflicting dozens of wounds on He-Man, Lion-O swoops in and slashes He-Man in the face, blinding him. Before He-Man can recover, Lion-O uses the flat of his Sword of Omens to send the intruder smashing through the wall and into an open courtyard. Dazed, bloody and reeling, He-Man tries to recover, only to be smashed flat by a giant stone column cut down by Lion-O. With his foe buried under tons of rubble, Lion-O prepares to call the rest of the ThunderCats. But before he can summon his teammates, He-Man explodes out of the debris, his eyes burning with rage. Raising the Sword of Power, He-Man engages Lion-O in a furious duel. Sparks fly as the swordsmen clash, but Lion-O's overmatched by He-Man's brute strength. Completely enraged, He-Man batters at the Feline Fury with his strength, landing a back kick to the midsection followed by an uppercut to Lion-O's jaw. After several punishing blows, He-Man connects with a roundhouse that echoes across Third Earth, from Castle Plun-Darr to the Berbil village, sending Lion-O flying back through a wall and into his throne room, beaten and unconscious. As He-Man stalks off to return to Eternia, he wonders if there're any other ornery pets around that need neutering.

this month's battle drawn by ED MCGUINNESS and AGUSTIN MARTIN

Knight Moves

by Casey Seijas

The dream team of Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee pull you into the shadows of Gotham City in this exclusive 'Batman' preview

When Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee take over *Batman* this October, the question won't be what the two have in store for DC's Dark Knight Detective, but rather what *don't* they have in store for him.

According to Loeb, when he and Lee jump on the title for a year-long storyarc (titled "Hush") starting with October's *Batman* #608, Gotham City's peacekeeper will be facing a threat the likes of which he's never encountered—two creators with tons of ideas to make life difficult for Batman.

"I think I have a very good understanding as to how Batman thinks, but I'm always interested in learning more," attests Loeb. "The main question will be, 'How long will Batman make good on the promise he made on his parents' grave—to rid Gotham City of the evil that took their lives?' Batman is very driven right from the get-go, so the trick is to find a way to tie him up, to hinder him. We've definitely got something in mind. And there will be a love story. I can't say who's involved, but it will really complicate things for everyone."

Likewise, Lee looks forward to showing the comic industry and his fans that, despite a two-year lull between *Batman* and his last monthly penciling gig on *Divine Right*, he's still one of the hottest and most influential pencilers around.

"Words really can't describe just how excited I am about this," enthuses Lee. "[During your career] you always remember the good and never the bad, and doing the monthly books was a great time for me. I remember the intense pressure. But there's nothing better than the feeling you have right after you finish your last page of a book and making your deadline."

Lee had better watch what he asks for, since Loeb expresses he'll be taking full advantage of Lee's penciling capabilities—starting with Batman's antagonists.

"Without getting into specifics, we'll be using the Rogues Gallery," hints Loeb, who also points out there will be mini-storyarcs within the larger storyline. "I have to admit there is a bit of a fanboy in me running around with a loose cannon. I'd never put a character into a story just to do it, but c'mon, I had to see Jim's Poison Ivy!"

Fans can also expect Gotham City to become a character all its own, plus there'll be new villainous psychopaths who Bats will have to deal with. In addition, Loeb coyly says, look for some crossovers and surprises.

Oh, if only October wasn't two months away .. Take a look at the next eight pages, and see why *Batman* #608 is sure to live up to the hype!

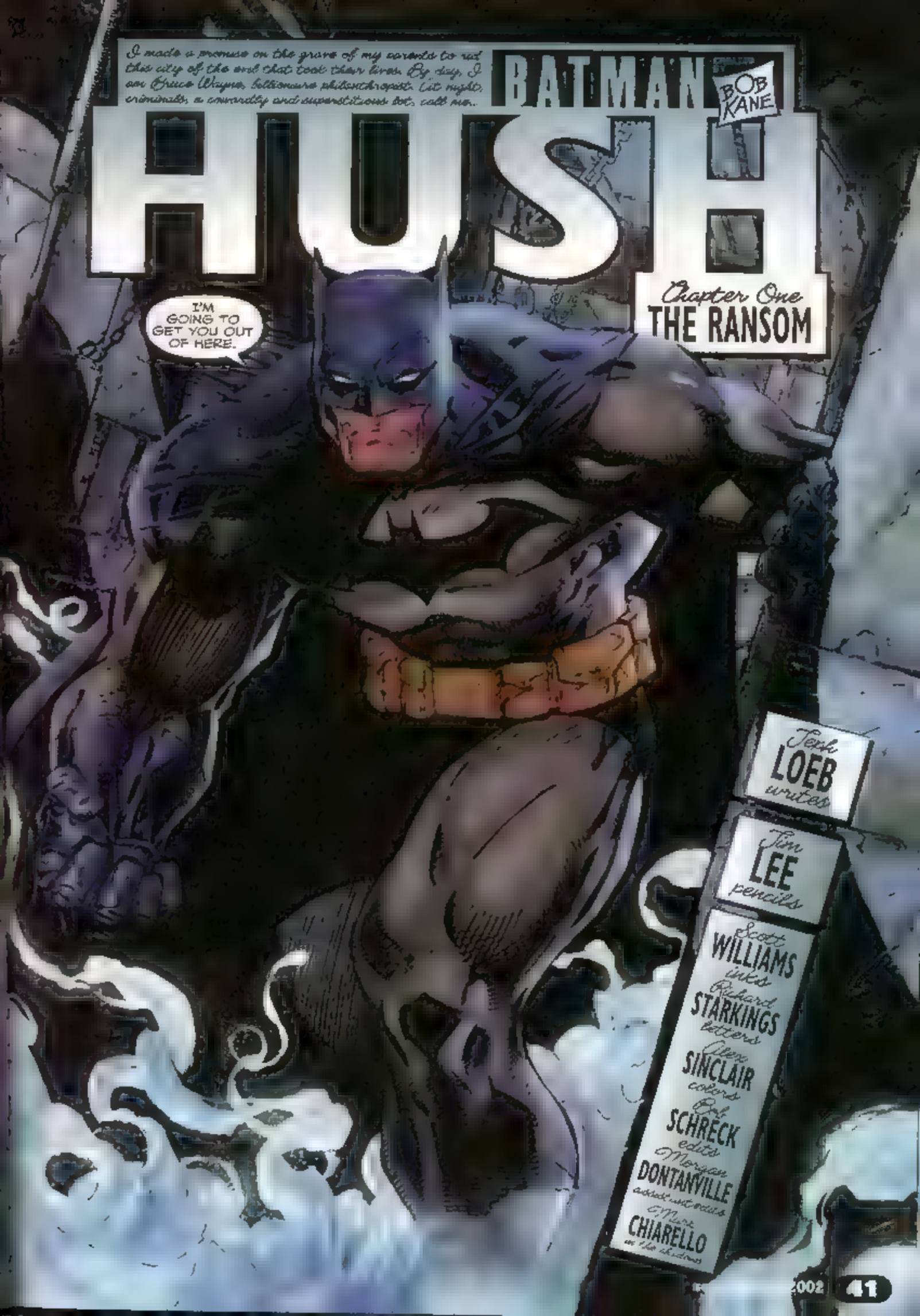
SILENT KNIGHT Jeph Loeb and Jim Lee [illegible] Batman in October with the storyarc "Hush"

Gotham City Shipyard. Almost Midnight.
I have one minute and thirteen seconds left. After that...
HSSNF
No time to pick the lock. The acid is faster, but unpredictable. Had to risk it.
If I don't find the hostage before he gets back...
The F.B.I. and D.E.O. cut the power. That will either make my job harder or easier. I'll know in the next few seconds.
THIS IS NN I'VE GOT MOVEMENT DOWN HERE

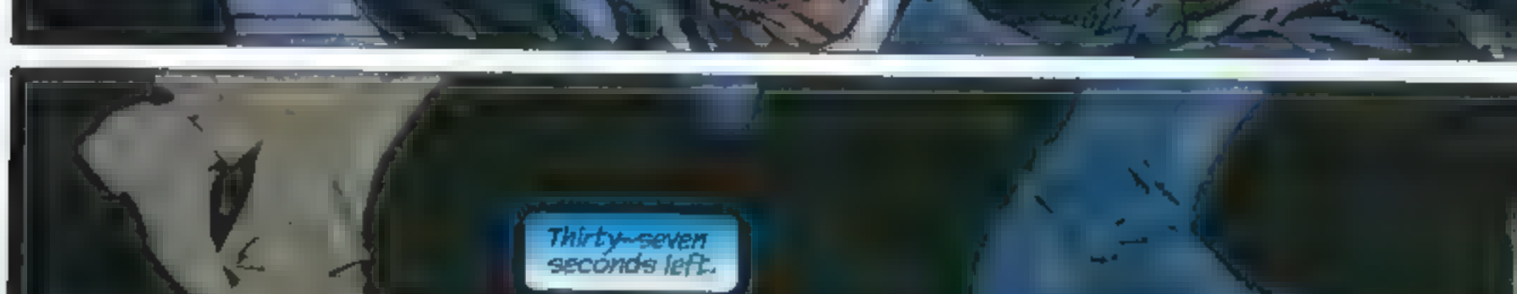
Nat is hotter. Former C.I.A. Old Right handed. The poison in the tips will paralyze his hand, arm, then go to work on his head.
Tommy Harper. Gun runner for the I.R.A. Has a metal plate in his skull making him susceptible to vertigo when hit in the correct spot with anything magnetic.
POK
Carlos Valdez. Chilean Mercenary. Likes to fight in close since his size makes him slow.
THWP
THWP
THWP

WHUMPH
Spider Hancock. Gotham City muscle. Broke two of his ribs three nights ago. They won't heal any time soon.

Someone spent a lot of money assembling this crew.
But, as Bruce Wayne will attest,,
..you have to spend money to make money.
STAY DOWN ON THE FLOOR AND COVER YOUR EARS.
WHAROOOM

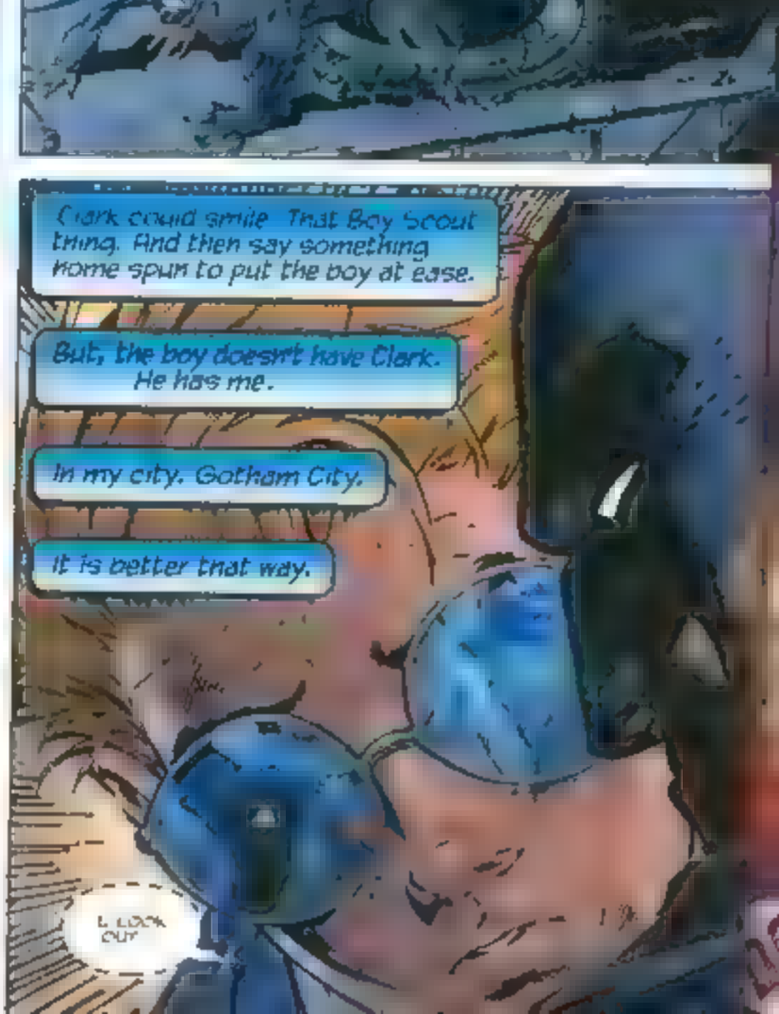

I made a promise on the grave of my parents to rid this city of the evil that took their lives. By day, I am Bruce Wayne, billionaire philanthropist. At night, criminals, a cowardly and superstitious lot, call me..
BATMAN
BOB KANE
HUSH
Chapter One
THE RANSOM
I'M GOING TO GET YOU OUT OF HERE.
Jeph LOEB writes
Jim LEE pencils
Scott WILLIAMS inks
Richard STARKINGS letters
Alex SINCLAIR colors
Bob SCHRECK edits
Morgan DONTANVILLE assistant art edits
Mark CHIARELLO

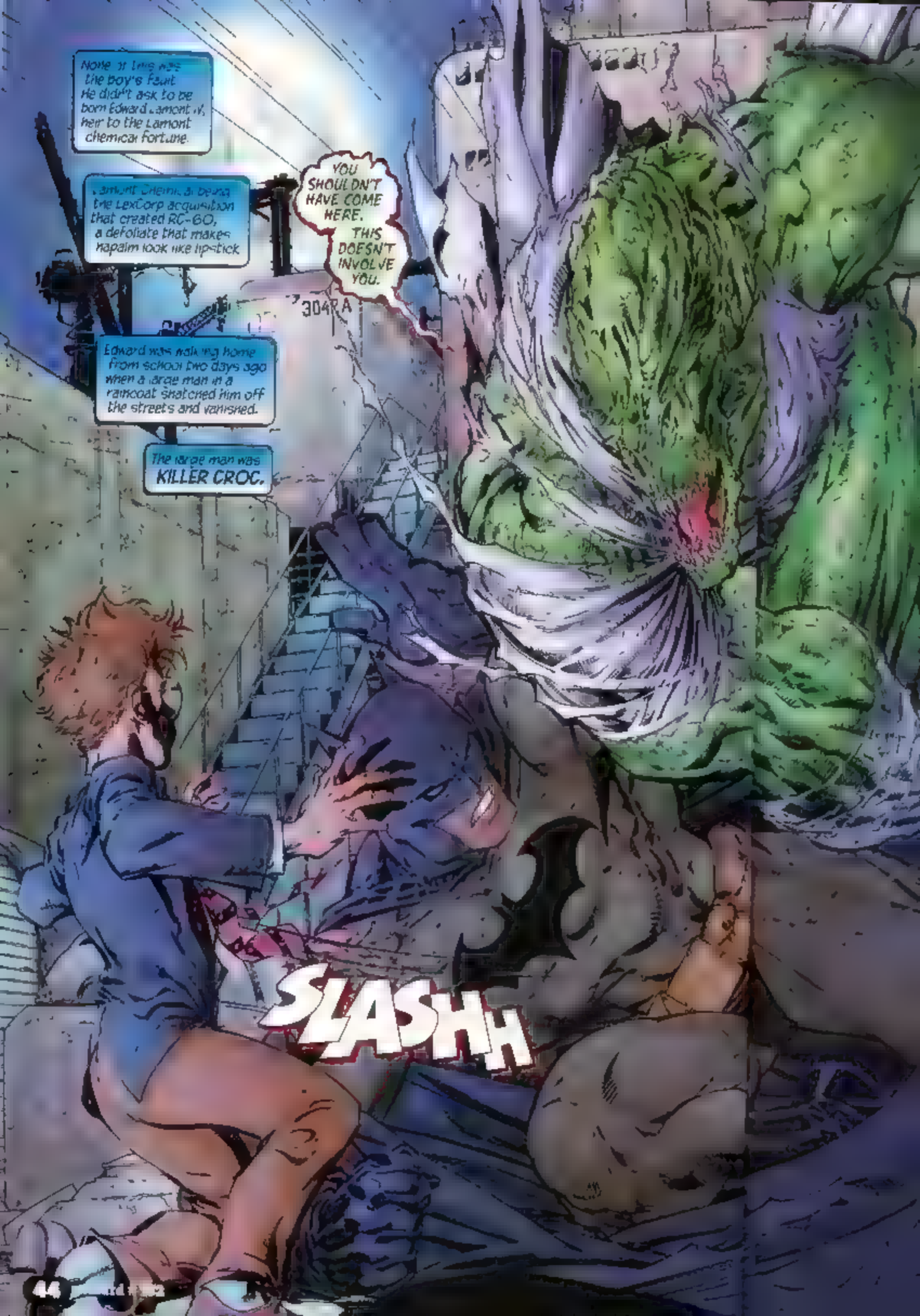
Y-YOU'RE... BATMAN...?
YES.


Thirty-seven seconds left.

The boy is trembling. Not that much older than I was when...
He's probably just as terrified of me as he is of what's happening.
PTOOM

It makes me think about Clark and how he'd handle the situation.
Not just the bending steel and flying out.


Clark could smile. That Boy Scout thing. And then say something home spun to put the boy at ease.
But, the boy doesn't have Clark. He has me.
In my city. Gotham City.
It is better that way.
LOOK OUT


None of this was the boy's fault. He didn't ask to be born Edward Lamont IV, heir to the Lamont chemical fortune.
Lamont Chemical owns the LexCorp acquisition that created RC-60, a defoliate that makes napalm look like lipstick.
YOU SHOULDN'T HAVE COME HERE. THIS DOESN'T INVOLVE YOU.
304R A
Edward was walking home from school two days ago when a large man in a raincoat snatched him off the streets and vanished.
The large man was KILLER CROC.
SLASHH

The ransom plot involved the Gotham City sewer system.
Everyone, but me.
CHECK OUT BATMAN #608 OCTOBER 23!

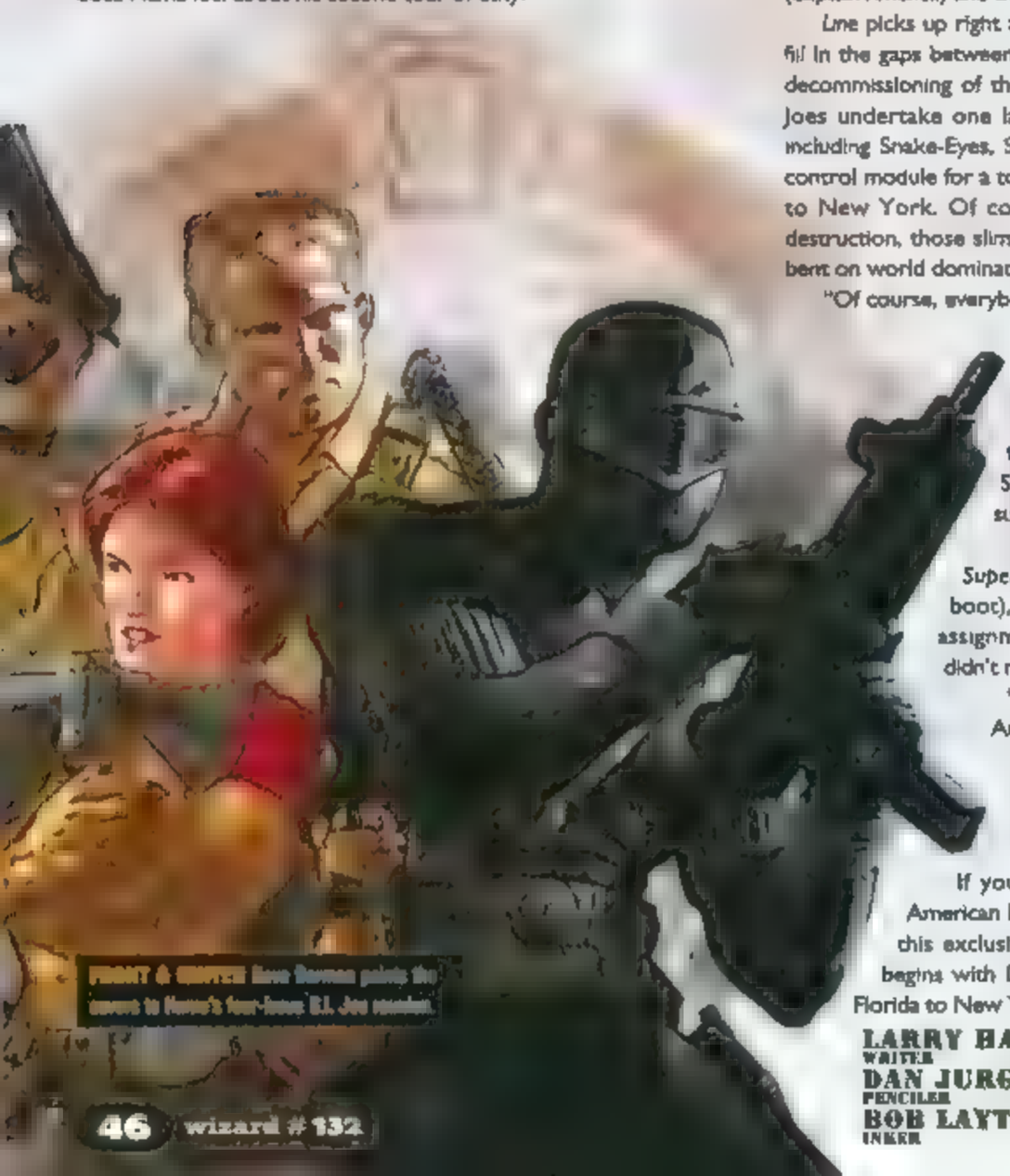
RETURN TO DUTY

BY JAMES McDONOUGH

Veteran 'G.I. Joe' writer Larry Hama re-enlists for his second tour with the all-new 'G.I. Joe: Front Line'

Forget Snake-Eyes—the toughest Joe of 'em all has just been reinstated.

This fall heralds the return of veteran *G.I. Joe* scribe Larry Hama on a second all-new G.I. Joe series from Image/Devil's Due Studios. Best known for his mammoth 12-year run on the original Marvel Comics series, as well as writing the dossiers for the original 3 3/4" action figures, Hama defined much of the Joe mythos. But after nearly a decade away from these Real American Heroes, how does Hama feel about his second tour of duty?



PRINT & WRITE: Dan Jurgens paints the covers to Hama's four-issue G.I. Joe mini.

"Very comfortable, actually," laughs the New York City-based writer. "It's a relief to not have to read five to10 years of somebody else's continuity, which I had to do [writing] *Batman* and *Wolverine*. With the Joes, 99.9 percent of the continuity is stuff I did."

Hama's storyarc will kick off *G.I. Joe: Front Line*, a new ongoing that will feature rotating creative teams giving their interpretations of the Joe universe—past, present and future. His as-yet untitled, four-issue run features art by fellow comic book veterans Dan Jurgens (*Captain America*) and Bob Layton (*Iron Man*).

Line picks up right after the end of Hama's original run and will fill in the gaps between the Marvel and Image series. Following the decommissioning of the G.I. Joe headquarters (a.k.a. the PIT), the Joes undertake one last mission. A select cadre of operatives, including Snake-Eyes, Scarlett and Gung-Ho, must safely deliver a control module for a top-secret particle beam weapon from Florida to New York. Of course, where there are weapons of mass destruction, those slimy snakes of Cobra—a terrorist organization bent on world domination—can't be slithering too far behind.

"Of course, everybody and their uncle are going to try and stop them," hints Hama. "The whole gamut of classic Cobras—Cobra Commander, Destro, the Baroness and Zartan."

The storyarc also broaches the tenuous relationship between Scarlett, Snake-Eyes and Storm Shadow, as well as a surprise cameo that'll please longtime Joe fans.

Having worked on both *Captain America* and *Superman* (and a former military illustrator to boot), penciler Dan Jurgens' latest All-American assignment re-ignited his patriotism—even if he didn't realize it at first.

"When you draw Superman or Captain America, you're aware that you're dealing with an American icon," he notes. "But I realize the same holds true for these characters. Young or old, everyone's got their favorite character or version of G.I. Joe."

If you want to see what it takes to be a Real American Hero, proceed to the next page to check out this exclusive *Wizard* preview. This frenetic sequence begins with Duke and company starting their trek from Florida to New York, and something feels very fishy... (W)

LARRY HAMA
WRITER
DAN JURGENS
PENCILER
BOB LAYTON
INKER
HI-FI DESIGN
COLORS AND SEPS
DREAMER DESIGN
LETTERERS
JOSH BLAYLOCK

I'M SORRY I'M NOT LEAVING MANY FOR YOU, SNAKE-EYES!
YOU CAN HAVE DIBS ON THE NEXT WAVE!
CLEAR THE WAY TO THE FLAT CAR!
WE HAVE TO SECURE THE PACKAGE!
GOT 'EM IN MY SIGHTS!
DON'T HIT THE BRIEF CASE!
RATATATTAT!
PONK!
PONK!
PONK!

SHOOT AT ME, YOU LOW-END REJECTS FROM THE DRESS-UP AND PLAY SOLDIER BRIGADE!
BLAM! BLAM! BLAM!
TAKE SOME AIMED FIRE IN THE FACE AND COME BACK SMILING, WHY DON'T YOU?
GUNNER! SUPPRESS THAT SHOOTER!
TZING!
SPAK!
PING!
CONSIDER H SUPPRESSED
FOOM!?
DAT'S ALL I NEED-- A NICE CLEAR SHOT AT AN OPEN DOOR TO BLOOP A FRAG THROUGH!

WHOMP!
KA-THOM!
UP AHEAD...
WE'RE FINISHED RIPPIN' UP THE TRACKS, ZARTAN!
YEAH! EVEN IF RIPPER JUST LAID BACK AND LET US DO ALL THE WORK!
ENOUGH OF THAT BICKERING!
EVERYBODY GET SOME COVER AND SET UP AN INTERSECTING FIELD OF FIRE TO MOP UP THE SURVIVORS!
CHECK OUT THE REST OF G.I. JOE: FRONT LINE #1 ON SALE OCTOBER 30!

THE X-MEN CONVENE Many of the actors in the first X-Men film, including (from left) Famke Janssen (Jean Grey), Halle Berry (Storm), Patrick Stewart (Professor X), James Marsden (Cyclops) and Hugh Jackman (Wolverine), return for the sequel, shooting now in Canada.

MARVEL MYSTERY TOUR

By Mike Cotton

Walk onto the sets of 'X-Men 2,' 'Daredevil' and 'Hulk' as WIZARD tours a typically hectic day at Marvel Studios. Try to keep up.

As the president of Marvel Studios, Avi Arad knows a lot about keeping secrets.

After all, as arguably the most powerful man in comic book movie filmmaking right now, Arad's secrets are worth millions of dollars, so one can understand why he's so stealthy.

"What you see here, stays here," the silver-haired, middle-aged Israeli says sternly during a spontaneous trip to the Vancouver, British Columbia studio set of 2003's highly anticipated mutant sequel, "X-Men 2." A stream of cars have just begun arriving, delivering the cast of the film for their first read-through of the script.

What started out as a visit to the offices of Marvel Studios in Santa Monica, Calif., this past June evolved into a day-and-a-half-long odyssey with Arad and his right-hand man, Kevin Feige, while the two consulted, checked up on and hobnobbed with the likes of Ang Lee, Ben Affleck, Bryan Singer and Hugh Jackman on the sets of "Hulk," "Daredevil" and now, "X-Men 2." With these and a host of other Marvel movies currently in development, they must constantly juggle to keep abreast of multiple projects at the same time.

"You're the first person on the set," informs Feige, the thirtysomething executive vice president of production for Marvel Studios, as the actors file into a conference room in the studio. "We won't even start shooting until Monday."

"But just remember," he echoes "What you see here, stays here."

Feige, who used to drink six Diet Cokes a day just to keep up with the frantic pace of tailing the fast-moving Arad, never knows where his next hour—much less his next day—will take him.

In fact, during a planned tour of the offices responsible for such cinematic hits as "Blade" and "Spider-Man," an impromptu jaunt up north to Vancouver was hastily put together, which is where all parties involved stand now.

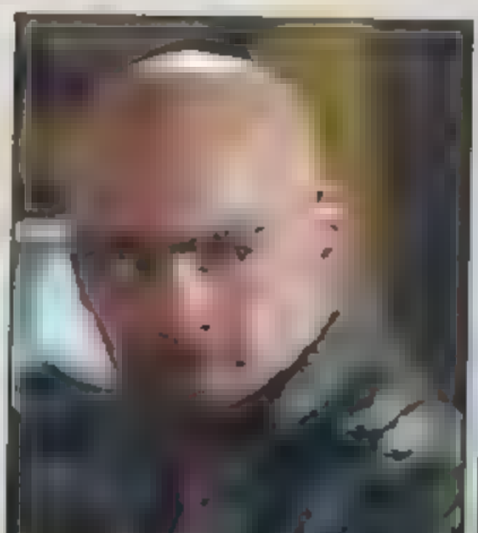
But what a rush. What follows is a blow-by-blow breakdown of what transpired during that frenetic 36-hour period, and you will be amazed at how much work got crammed into that short window of time

9:30 a.m. Pacific Coast Time

Everyone at Marvel Studios receives a list of news items appearing in the day's Internet columns and trade magazines regarding the studio's films so that the entire staff is updated on current rumors and speculation. Today's biggest stories both revolve around the sequel to "Spider-Man," rumored for a May, 2004 release. One Internet site reports Sam Neill ("Jurassic Park") is in talks to play Doctor Octopus in the film while *Variety* reports "Spider-Man" screenwriter David Koepp will write a first draft of Spidey 2's screenplay, even though "Smallville" creators Miles Millar and Al Gough are already working on a script for the film. The latter is true, not so much for Neill's casting.

"David's got a great idea that Miles and Al will work off of," reveals Feige.

"But Sam Neill? He might do a great job but I don't know where this came from." Feige just shakes his head at how rampant and pervasive these kinds of rumors are



BALD BADDIES In "Daredevil," two of the film's follicly challenged villains will be Bullseye (Colin Farrell) and Kingpin (Michael Clarke Duncan).

9:45 a.m.

After a series of frenzied calls over the weekend from "X-Men director Bryan Singer, who's in Vancouver prepping "X-Men 2 Feige tries to get him on the phone. After numerous failed attempts Feige settles for an executive from 20th Century Fox, who's producing the film. "X-Men 2," slotted for a May 2, 2003 debut, is already over budget. Singer wants to keep two intense and visual-effect-heavy scenes in the film—one involving the X-Men's famed Danger Room. "Where it sits in the script right now, it's like a chicken with an eight-inch neck," laments Feige. "Some stuff's going to have to go. Honestly, [at this point], there's a lot still up in the air."

9:55 a.m.

Arad, just back from the European premiere of "Spider-Man," calls Feige from his car to say he's on his way to the office. Feige gives him an early earful as to what and where "Daredevil" and "Hulk" will be shooting later that afternoon

10 a.m.

Singer, just out of an "X-Men 2" story meeting, calls Feige back The two talk quickly about the progress of the film, which begins shooting the following Monday and agree that Feige and Arad should fly to Vancouver tonight for the first reading of the script tomorrow with the cast. Singer also wants to discuss how much give there is in the budget

10:10 a.m.

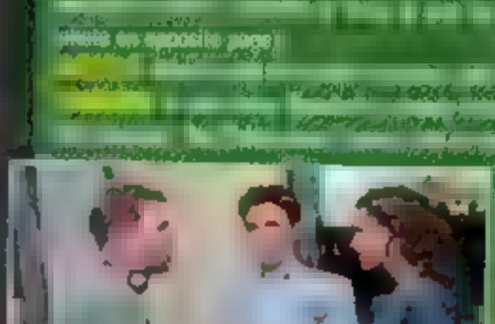
Sitting in his toy-filled office, Executive of Creative Affairs Craig Kyle watches early animation tests of the "Spider-Man" cartoon planned for airing on MTV in summer 2003. Watching Spider-Man swing through a CGI-rendered New York City, Kyle points to the screen. "See right here? We want to give his body more weight. Right now he looks like a leaf blowing in the wind We've got to work on that."

10:15 a.m.

In Marvel Studio's vast comic book library (there are over 200 boxes of comics stored within), Story Editor Jason Miller pulls reference on Daredevil's trainer, Stick, and his foes, The Hand, for "Daredevil" director Mark Steven Johnson. At the same time, he

ELEKTRA LIVES!

First look at Jennifer Garner in 'Daredevil' movie costume



JENNIFER GARNER AND GARNER

story for her. I wanted her costume to be one that would enable her to make that transition from Elektra Natchios into Elektra: Assassin I wanted her to be able to go in and out of the shadows in her search for Daredevil, and bright red sashes and necklaces wouldn't allow for that, but in the future, once

...ve into that of the comic character

...nnie for the role works

How do you think Garner looks in costume?

One words: Yowza!

...ll be pleased as them. ■ JIM McLAUCHLIN

directs an intern to begin shredding copies of old scripts

It's part security, part housecleaning," notes Miller. "You'd be surprised what people will dig through the trash for. We've got 'Hulk' scripts going back to 1994. When we have multiple copies of the same stuff, sometimes we shred those, too."

10:20 a.m.

Vice President of Production Ari Arad (son of Avi) heads over to Universal Interactive, where they're working on the Hulk movie video game for all the next-gen systems as well as a Game Boy Advance Hulk game based on the first 100 issues of the series. The movie game would impress even the most hardcore Hulk fans, with the Green Goliath towering over his enemies.

"We'll give him the ability to do a thunder clap and some other classic Hulk moves," informs game Producer Jeff Barnhart. In one scene of the film, the Hulk takes on radiated dogs, and in the video game, he'll have the same fight. "When the dogs jump for his neck, can we have Hulk grab them and bite them? Or is that too much work?" asks Ari Arad.

"I think we can do that," replies Barnhart. "I think we could definitely do that."

10:40 a.m.

Feige and Avi Arad sit down with Dick Buckley, who was the second unit director of "Spider-Man" and is also a very successful commercial director looking to make the move to feature films. The three talk about the possibility of Buckley directing one of the Marvel films set up at Artisan Entertainment, which are all planned for a $20 million budget. The properties include "The Punisher," "Iron Fist" and "Captain America."

Are there any chick superheroes?" asks Buckley, who, clad in a black leather jacket, looks more New Jersey than Hollywood. "I could get into that." The discussion turns to all the Marvel films already in production before they agree to talk more when Buckley has a better idea of which property he'd like a shot at.

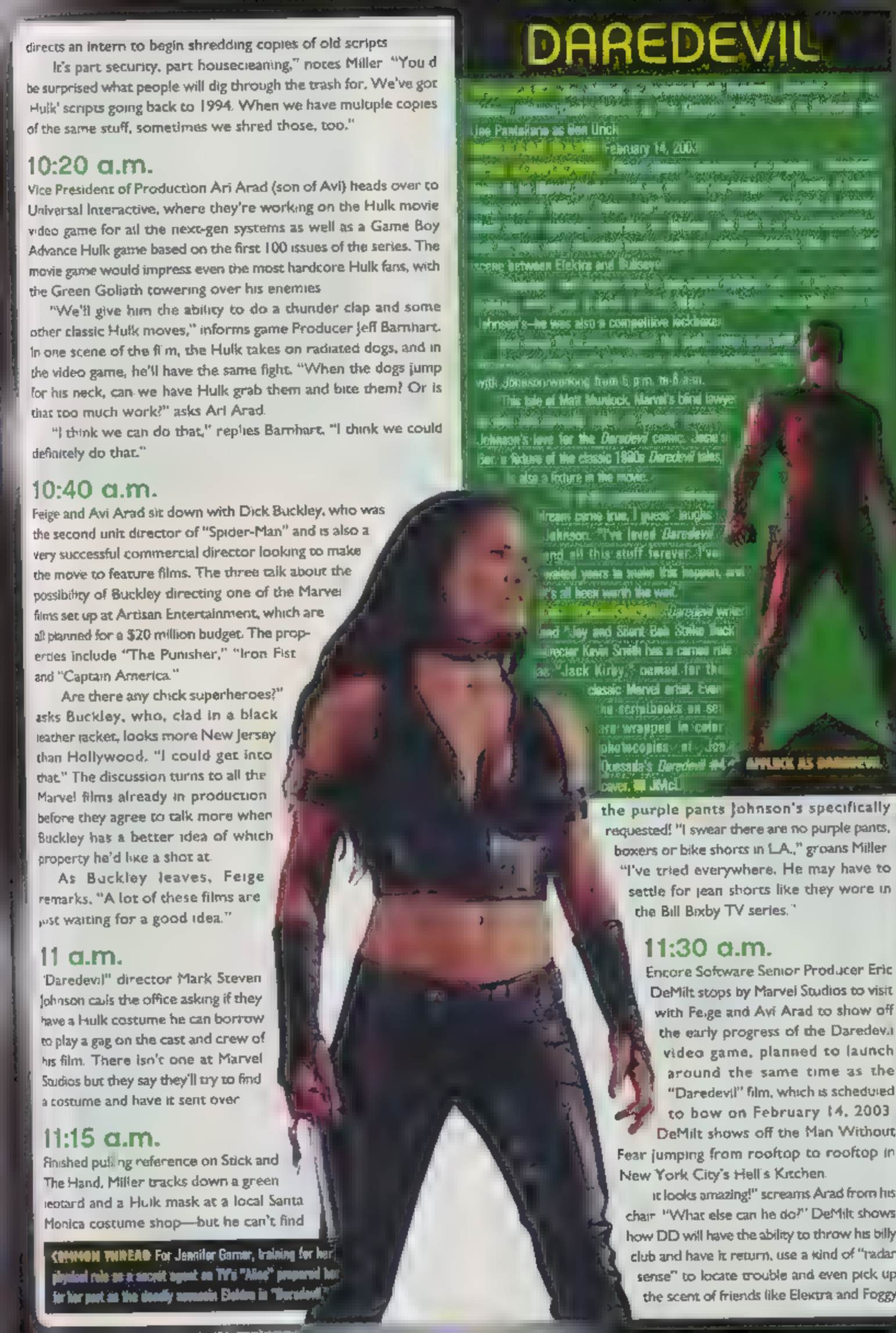
As Buckley leaves, Feige remarks, "A lot of these films are just waiting for a good idea."

11 a.m.

"Daredevil" director Mark Steven Johnson calls the office asking if they have a Hulk costume he can borrow to play a gag on the cast and crew of his film. There isn't one at Marvel Studios but they say they'll try to find a costume and have it sent over.

11:15 a.m.

Finished pulling reference on Stick and The Hand, Miller tracks down a green leotard and a Hulk mask at a local Santa Monica costume shop—but he can't find



COMMON THREAD For Jennifer Garner, training for her physical role as a secret agent on TV's "Alias" prepared her for her part as the deadly assassin Elektra in "Daredevil."

the purple pants Johnson's specifically requested! "I swear there are no purple pants, boxers or bike shorts in L.A.," groans Miller. "I've tried everywhere. He may have to settle for jean shorts like they wore in the Bill Bixby TV series."

11:30 a.m.

Encore Software Senior Producer Eric DeMilt stops by Marvel Studios to visit with Feige and Avi Arad to show off the early progress of the Daredevil video game, planned to launch around the same time as the "Daredevil" film, which is scheduled to bow on February 14, 2003. DeMilt shows off the Man Without Fear jumping from rooftop to rooftop in New York City's Hell's Kitchen.

It looks amazing!" screams Arad from his chair. "What else can he do?" DeMilt shows how DD will have the ability to throw his billy club and have it return, use a kind of "radar sense" to locate trouble and even pick up the scent of friends like Elektra and Foggy

Nelson. DeMilt also says Encore's already planning the game as a five-year franchise with the possibility of an Elektra game soon to follow.

11:40 a.m.

Arad and Feige realize they have less than half an hour to make it across town to the "Daredevil" set to watch dailies of yesterday's shooting. The two jump into Arad's black Mercedes-Benz and shoot down L.A.'s famed Wilshire Boulevard, breaking all kinds of traffic laws. During the drive, Arad calls his son at the office to voice his notes over changes to the "Werewolf by Night" script the studio's working on, and he briefly outlines a plan to get a Spider-Man float back into the Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade.

"Do you know how much publicity that is?" asks Arad rhetorically. Consistently throughout the phone call, Arad's cut off by bad cellular signals. "We put a man on the moon and I can't get a phone call down the street," he rages as he cuts in and out of traffic.

12 p.m.

Traffic's at a standstill on Wilshire.

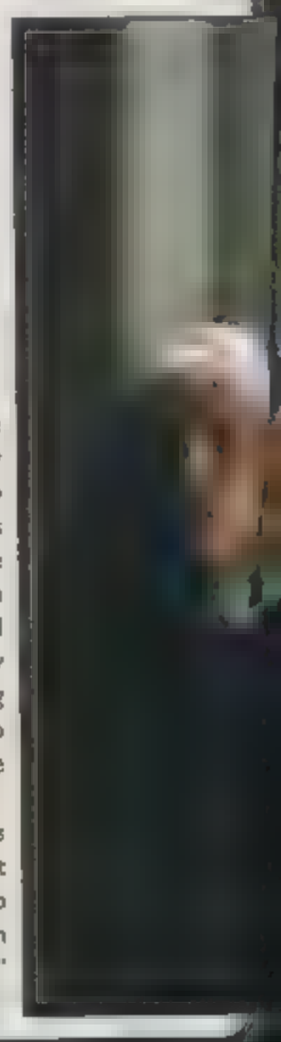
"What is this?" asks Arad incredulously as he peers out the car window at flashing lights and slow moving police cruisers up ahead. "What could this be?" A few minutes later, six runners jog slowly by, carrying a torch.

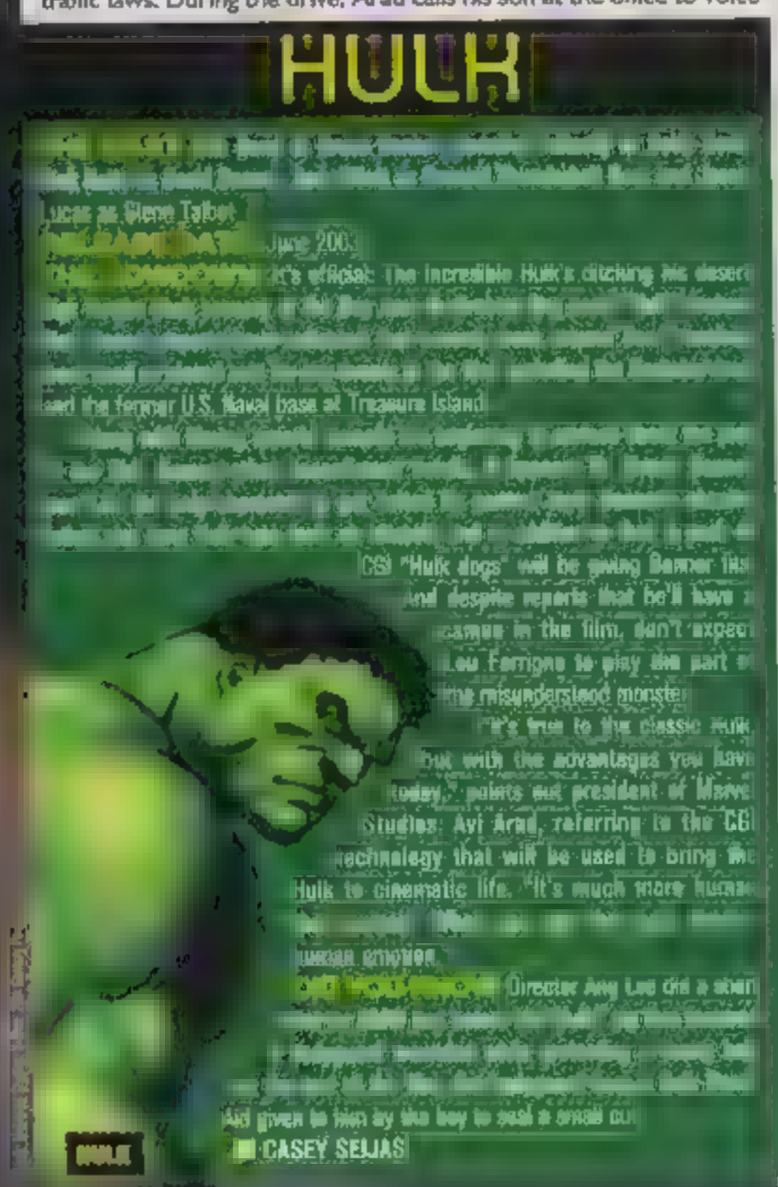
"That torch isn't even lit," chuckles Arad. "What is this? Are the Olympics in town? This looks like the Special Olympics to me."

12:15 p.m.

Arad and Feige finally make it to the "Daredevil" base camp. The two quickly spring to Mark Steven Johnson's trailer to get a glimpse at the dailies. Today's film shows footage shot for a huge fight sequence between DD's romantic interest, Elektra (played by "Alias" star Jennifer Garner), and bad guy Bullseye (Colin Farrell of "Minority Report"). Johnson, who describes directing "Daredevil" as a "dream come true," also reveals some shots in the movie will come directly from the comic pages.

"It all looks magnificent," comments Arad. The duo also gets a look at a rough cut of the "Daredevil" trailer that's planned to run in front of the Steven Spielberg, Tom Cruise sci-fi action pic, "Minority Report." Arad approves it but adds one note




HULK
Lucas as Glenn Talbot
June 200
t's official: The Incredible Hulk's ditching his desert
ead the former U.S. Naval base at Treasure Island
CG "Hulk dogs" will be giving Banner his
and despite reports that he'll have a
cameo in the film, don't expect
Lou Ferrigno to play the part of
the misunderstood monster.
"It's true to the classic Hulk
but with the advantages you have
today," points out president of Marvel
Studios Avi Arad, referring to the CG
technology that will be used to bring the
Hulk to cinematic life. "It's much more human
human emotion
Director Ang Lee did a short
and given to him as the key to cast a small cu
CASEY SEIJAS
HULK

Cast members from the Hulk movie, from left to right: Eric Bana as Bruce Banner, Jennifer Connelly as Betty Ross, Nick Nolte as David Banner, Sam Elliott as General Thunderbolt Ross and Josh Lucas as Glenn Talbot.

"I barely noticed the Kingpin," he comments, referring to the film's main villain as played by Michael Clarke Duncan. "It needs more of him. I see more of [rapper] Coolio than I do of the Kingpin."

12:45 p.m.

Arad, flanked by Feige and Johnson, heads over to the "Daredevil" set. Today, the crew's shooting one of the early scenes in the film at the First Congregational Church in downtown L.A. It involves Ben Affleck's Daredevil talking with his priest.

"This is a day without a lot of action," observes Arad as he walks to talk to Affleck. "But it has a lot of heart—a lot of character." Arad then sticks around long enough to watch Affleck practice a crawl across the floor of the church before saying his goodbyes, grabbing a quick snack and jumping back into his car.

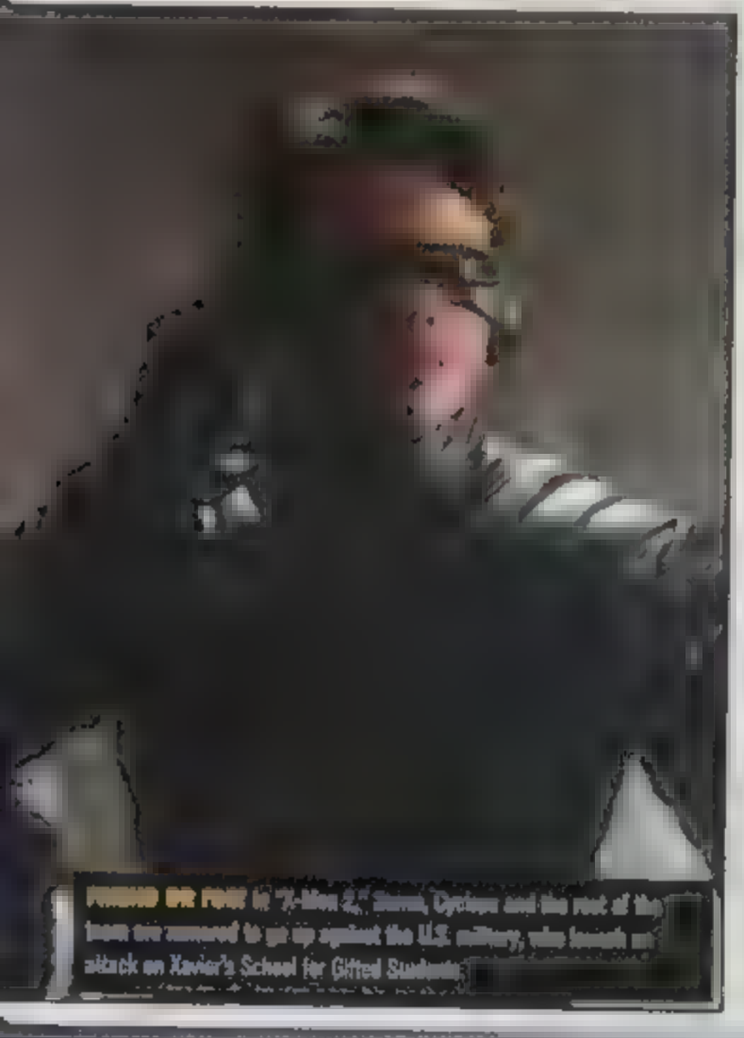
1:30 p.m.

Avi, his son, Ari and Feige meet up with "Ghost Rider" screenwriter Shane Salerno ("Armageddon"), back at the Marvel Studios offices. The four discuss the direction of the script, which actor Nicolas Cage was at one time attached to. Sadly, they would offer no further information on the film. But Salerno got in some good-natured ribbing with the senior Arad.

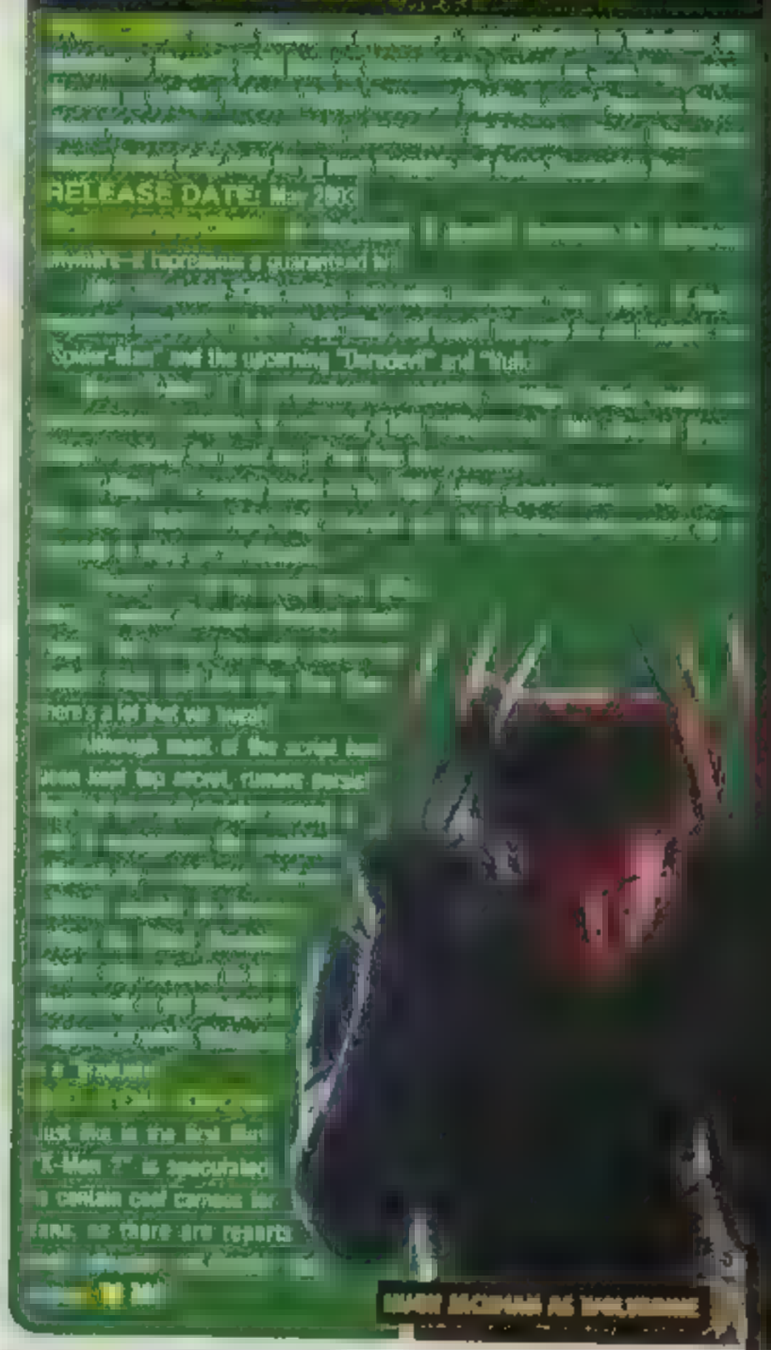
"I can't believe you're working on anything but 'Ghost Rider,' man," kids the writer. "I mean, 'X-Men'? Who's ever heard of that?"

2:30 p.m.

The next meeting involves the "Namor" film, based on Marvel's resident waterbound hero. Again, the two Arads and Feige are present as they sit down with screenwriter David Self ("Thirteen Days") to go over his vision of the story before he even begins writing. Self actually sees "Namor" as a trilogy of films, possibly all filmed simultaneously like "Lord of the Rings."



FOUNDED ON FEAR in "X-Men 2," Storm, Cyclops and the rest of the team are rumored to go up against the U.S. military, who launch an attack on Xavier's School for Gifted Students.



"I can see this as Namor discovering who he is, Namor the Avenging Son and Namor, the King of Atlantis," explains Self. "Each movie would stand alone but they'd all tie together, too. I think it makes it feel more epic." For the next hour and a half, Self details the beats of the first film. Arad loves it but offers a few small notes to the story before the meeting adjourns.

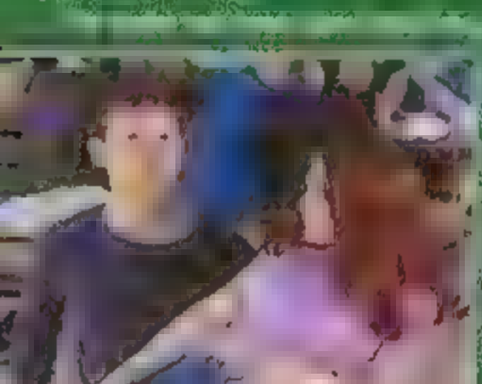
"It took us three years just to get to these meetings," marvels Arad as he reflects on the day's events thus far. "For this, it was worth it."

4 p.m.

Avi Arad and Feige shoot over to the "Hulk" set (in an L.A. location we can't reveal) for a quick visit with director Ang Lee ("Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon"), just hours before they have to make their 7:30 flight to Vancouver where they'll finally hook up with Singer to talk about "X-Men 2." While Lee and Arad chat about the special effects that will be used to make the Hulk come to life, Feige and "Hulk" star Eric Bana ("Black Hawk Down") discuss using a manipulated version of the actor's voice for the Hulk movie toy, which is already in production. Just back from shooting extensive scenes in San Francisco, the "Hulk"

SPIDER-MAN 2

RELEASE DATE: May 2004



TOBEY MAGUIRE & KIRSTEN DUNST

against anyone trying to catch a peek at exactly what's going on during filming

4:40 p.m.

Before heading to Los Angeles International Airport for their flight, Arad and Feige look over sketches for the Nightcrawler and Hulk action figures being designed by ToyBiz to coincide with the "X-Men 2" and "Hulk" movie releases. Arad thinks the Hulk's head should be a little bigger but overall is pleased with the toys.

5:20 p.m.

Back at Marvel Studios, Avi Arad returns a few phone calls to Hollywood execs while Feige checks on the status of their flight. Not long after that, they hop into a car and head to the airport.

10:30 p.m.

After a two-and-a-half-hour flight, Arad and Feige are across the border in warm Vancouver, sharing another car to their hotel, which is just a 15 minute-drive from the Vancouver Film Studios where the "X-Men 2" production office is located. Arad doesn't even look bleary-eyed yet. "This has actually been one of the slower days," he chuckles, smiling

Epilogue

By 9:30 a.m. the next day, Arad and Feige are already on the "X-Men 2" studio set. A quick glimpse around and there are carpenters and other laborers busily assembling the first stages of what will be the film's Cerebro set and a replica of the president's Oval Office.

Arad, Feige and Singer meet with numerous producers and Fox executives, all of whom have a different idea of where the X-Men franchise should be headed. For the next four hours, the entire group meets to discuss everything from the script to the budget to toys and plans for publicity.

"It's going to be a very long day," states Arad as he walks to another meeting, pausing momentarily to chat. For the second time that day, Arad disappears behind closed doors where only the insiders on the "X-Men" sequel are privy to the big secrets of the film.

By 2 p.m., the cast of "X-Men 2" begins to arrive in white Lincoln Town cars for the first planned script reading with Singer and the producers. The first to show up is Professor X actor Patrick Stewart, dressed casually in jeans and a black t-shirt. Next comes Hugh Jackman (Wolverine), carrying his six-foot-plus frame through the halls. After a continuous procession of Hollywood talent over the next half-hour, almost the entire cast has finally assembled in a conference room that, to their dismay, lacks air conditioning.

As electric fans are brought in to cool off the area, Singer begins calling for everyone to take their places around the large meeting table at the center of the room.

"This will be our first and best gauge of how the script works," notes Feige as he steps behind the closing door. "It's pretty much just reading, not even acting, but it'll finally give us an idea of where we are before we start shooting on Monday. This is a big day."

"But just remember," he winks. "What you see here, stays here."

The stuff we couldn't print that Staff Writer Mike Cotton saw on his trip will be included as extras on the DVD release of this issue.

MARVEL WELCOME The success of "Spider-Man" has opened doors and allowed for bigger budgets on future projects at Marvel Films.

FEAR FACTOR

DRIVEN BY FEAR, CONTROVERSIAL CREATOR MARK WAID HAS EMBARKED ON A CAREER-LONG ODYSSEY SEARCHING FOR SUCCESS AND ACCEPTANCE. UP NEXT? A STINT ON 'FANTASTIC FOUR.'

As Mark Waid sits in front of his computer staring at a blank screen, a single emotion sweeps over him. It's 4:30 p.m. and deadlines loom. There's a plot for *Ruse* that's already two days late. And ideas for his upcoming *Fantastic Four* run are bubbling over in his brain, just waiting to come popping out.

But Waid can't think straight. It's not writer's block he's struggling with, it's something much deeper, nagging at his very being. But this shouldn't be happening. After all, he's Mark Waid, Mark friggin' Waid, the outstanding writer who's crafted such legendary tales as *Kingdom Come*, the highly acclaimed and successful DC mini-series that some people even put in the same category as such luminary works as *Watchmen* and *Batman: The Dark Knight Returns*. But none of that matters right now as that same empty feeling gnaws at Waid's gut. Eventually the words will flow from Waid's brain onto the computer screen, tumbling out and erasing all doubts. But right now one emotion clouds Waid's thoughts.

Mark Waid is scared.

"I'm honestly scared that one day someone will call and say 'Okay, joke's over.'" Waid admits without hesitation. "I'm scared they'll all see I'm some kind of comic book fraud. It doesn't matter how many times I hear that I'm good, I still don't really believe it."

That fear—fear of failure, fear of commitment, fear of stagnation, maybe even fear of acceptance—has driven Waid throughout his career. And it's driven him to illustrious heights—he resuscitated both *Captain America* and *Flash* from near-dormant status, administering CPR to two books that were barely breathing and boosting them into the top 50 on Diamond's Top 100 comics chart. But those same insecurities have also led to a nomadic existence that has seen him bounce from company to company, leaving behind a familiar pattern: Waid arrives amid much fanfare, Waid revives a title, Waid feuds with co-workers and leaves abruptly, usually under acrimonious circumstances.

"My career path looks like the Hiroshima attack plans," Waid openly says with a chuckle.

While Waid may be joking, he isn't far from the truth. He's been fired by both Marvel and DC, only to return to each company. He's engaged in public—and sometimes nasty—feuds with creators ranging from Alex Ross to Scott Lobdell to former Marvel Editor-in-Chief Bob Harras. He's openly challenged authority, taking to task bosses he didn't agree with. A true man of principle, he's even quit jobs he loved when he felt an injustice had been done (such as the Red Skull rewrite of his Captain America tale). Waid's battles have left him so beaten, he's even considering giving up comics altogether.

But he can't. Why? Simple. He's afraid to.

BY MIKE COTTON

DARK DAYS AT DC

From the time he left Hueytown, Ala., Waid knew he wanted to be a comic writer. But for the longest time, he was afraid he'd never get the chance to write his favorite icons like Superman, Batman and the JLA.

His first big break came in 1986, when he took the position of editor at *Amazing Heroes*, a now dead fanzine published by Fantagraphics. But as Waid puts it, he's "not very good at working in office situations."

One story widely circulated around comic book professionals details Waid storming out of *Amazing Heroes* after a dispute with another staffer, but not before pushing a couch out of his second-floor office window.

"That's totally untrue," laughs Waid. "That never happened. I think I did throw a typewriter at a chair in frustration once—and no one was in the chair by the way—but I don't think that was the day I quit."

Waid's tumultuous stint at *Amazing Heroes* led to an assistant editor position at DC Comics in 1987, where he worked on the very successful *Justice League* relaunch by Keith Giffen and J.M. DeMatteis as well as Grant Morrison's *Doom Patrol*.

But Waid's stay at DC wasn't any more comfortable than his previous job at *Amazing Heroes*. In fact, Waid admits he made a mistake early on in his tenure, one that would haunt him. ("It was a pretty big one," Waid admits, but refuses to elaborate on.) The black cloud hovering over Waid never went away, eventually leading to his dismissal on Christmas Eve 1989, an unusual occurrence at normally staid DC where editorial firings are rare.

Again, Waid found himself afraid he'd just blown his one shot at a successful career in comics.

BACK IN A FLASH

"Do you want to write the Flash?"

The question shocked Waid. A few years after leaving DC as an editor in 1989, his friend and former DC co-collaborator Brian Augustyn asked Waid if he'd be interested in penning the lackluster and failing *Flash* series that ranked 71st on Diamond's Top 100 comics chart. "No one really thought Mark was the guy to do *Flash*," recalls Augustyn. "But the Flash was so under the radar no one really thought too much about it."

Despite his enthusiasm, Waid couldn't speed up sales on *The Flash*. Sales plummeted into the 90s during the early stages of his run before eventually turning around.

"I was honestly one of those guys who said, 'Wally West isn't the Flash. Where's [Silver Age Flash] Barry Allen?'" remembers Waid. "I decided the only way to write Wally was to write him like he was me—minus 40 pounds and running fast."

But a few months into the run, Waid figured out the secret—Wally West had to be a real guy—Wally West had to be Mark Waid. Fans responded to Waid's personal touches like Wally's family problems and relationship woes with women—both based on Waid's own experiences. Soon after, *The Flash* returned to the top 50—not a top-selling book by any means but a marked improvement over its previous incarnations during that era.

Suddenly, Waid had a career in front of him and offers began to flood in.

"MY CAREER PATH LOOKS LIKE THE HIROSHIMA ATTACK PLANS."

–MARK WAID

MPRESSIVE
WILL IT ALSO--LIKE THE CUBE--
NNNGH!
--TRANSFORM YOUR RAGE INTO POWER?
GHUUH!
WILL ITS ENERGIES-
GRANT YOU A GLIMPSE INTO YOUR OPPONENT'S MIND--
--SO THAT YOU CAN COUNTER HIS EVERY MOVE WITH ONE OF YOUR OWN?

UP AND DOWNS "I decided the only way to write Wally [West] was to write him like he was ass-kicker 40 pounds and running fast," laughs Waid, on his approach to writing *The Flash* (left), a title he helped lift from the doldrums. And while he thought he was doing a similarly good job in writing *Captain America* (above), Marvel replaced him 10 issues into his run—only to ask him back a short while later. A year after his return, he quit the book in a huff.

TROUBLE WITH OTHER CREATORS

Waid had everything he'd ever wanted.

By 1995, Waid was taking *The Flash* to new heights as well as writing a character he thought of as second only to Superman Captain America, Marvel's Sentinel of Liberty And he was also in the process of crafting what would become his most highly acclaimed success, *Kingdom Come*. The story revolved around the DC Universe of the future, where Superman—aided by Wonder Woman and a host of DC icons—must return to the people he's turned his back on to battle Earth's new breed of superheroes While the series was a bona fide smash hit for Waid and co-collaborator/painter Alex Ross in terms of sales numbers and critical acclaim, it also sparked a bitter feud between the pair, one that exists to this day

Ross publicly charged Waid with taking too much credit for the success and direction of *Kingdom Come* and the two agreed they'd most likely never work together again.

Waid was facing a new enemy now: his growing reputation as a difficult creator to work with

"Mark Waid's a huge d---," says one anonymous artist who worked with Waid, resorting to a term more commonly used to describe a part of the male anatomy. "He's the kind of guy who will get you fired from a book if he doesn't like you. He wants things done his way and he'll end your career to prove he's right."

At the same time Waid was basking in the success of *Kingdom Come*, his dream project of *Captain America* would turn into a nightmare.

Shortly after Waid came on board, Marvel secretly set up the

"Heroes Reborn" deal, with plans to turn over the creative reigns on several titles, including *Captain America*, to Image Comics founders Rob Liefeld and Jim Lee for a revamp.

Just 10 issues into Waid's *Cap* run, the series was canceled and relaunched with artist Rob Liefeld assuming creative duties.

Like the Flash though, Waid kept moving. He took a gig on *X-Men* alongside Lobdell, who penned the sister publication *Uncanny X-Men*. By the end of the run, Lobdell and Waid were at each other's throats and Waid had earned the reputation as a writer who "wanted to do things his way, not necessarily the way he was supposed to do them," according to one editor.

An irate Lobdell even went so far as to call Waid "the least talented, fattest f---ing man in comics."

Over the next 12 months, Waid bounced from title to title writing a two-issue arc of *Avengers* here, a *Tales of the Marvel Universe* tale there and even a 14-issue run on *Ka-Zar*.

It wasn't long before Marvel wanted Waid back on *Captain America*. The relaunch under Liefeld had been met with lukewarm response and was plagued by late shipping. Marvel relaunched the title again, this time with Waid as writer and Andy Kubert (*Origin*) as the artist. Waid was ecstatic.

It wouldn't last.

ONE TOO MANY REWRITES

As the scribe of *Captain America* and *The Flash* in the mid '90s, Waid couldn't believe how incredibly lucky he was—"Lucky," he says tellingly—not talented.

Working on *Cap* came at a cost, though. "Every script had some kind of change to it," remembers Waid. "We'd have to use a different villain here or a different cameo there. It was a frustrating book to write. We didn't have the same freedom we had when I first worked on Cap."

Instead of the free reign he enjoyed during his first Cap stint, the series was now a success and Marvel wanted to exercise creative control.

Things went from bad to worse on *Cap* within a year of Waid's return. After plotting a story that would show why the Red Skull became a Nazi and why he held his beliefs, Waid had the plot approved by editor Matt Idelson and then-Marvel Editor-in-Chief Harras. The script and pencilled pages were also subsequently approved. Within days of the issue going to press, Waid received a call from Idelson.

According to sources working for Marvel at the time, Harras reversed his decision on running the issue unedited and rewrote most of the issue without Waid's consent. Waid was furious. He immediately demanded that Marvel take his name off the book and quit the title on the spot.

"[Mark] was miserable," recalls Kubert. "Having something you pour your heart and soul into and you think you're doing the right thing and you have it redone without even discussing it with you really hurts."

The departure sent Waid into a tailspin, one that would take him nearly two years to recover from.

"The entire thing really sent me out of control," relates Waid. "I didn't know what to do next and I didn't know what I wanted to do next. I was totally rudderless."

SUPER DISAPPOINTMENT

Reeling from the second loss of *Captain America* in less than three years, Waid was lost. He felt like a human pinball as he began to bounce around from company to company, always leaving on bad terms.

"After *Cap*, I really lost all direction in terms of my career," says Waid. "I was just trying to keep my head above water really. An issue of *Superman*, then a mini-series. I just kept moving."

With controversy swirling around him and with rumblings circulating that he was problematic to work with, Waid had difficulty securing monthly work he wanted, despite the success of *Kingdom Come*.

He did a *JLA: Year One* maxi-series, then a few issues of *Man of Steel*, and then another JLA mini-series before pitching a complete revamp of the entire Superman line along with friends Grant Morrison (*New X-Men*), Tom Peyer (*Titans*) and Mark Millar (*Ultimate X-Men*) in 1998.

After months of ongoing discussions and story pitches, Waid and company thought they had the Superman gig wrapped up. However,

BITTERSWEET ACCLAIM Some of Waid's successes have come at a cost. A much-publicized feud with Alex Ross after their critically praised *Kingdom Come* mini-series (above) goes on to this day, and a falling out between he and CrossGen founder Mark Alessi resulted when Waid quit the popular *Ruse* (right).

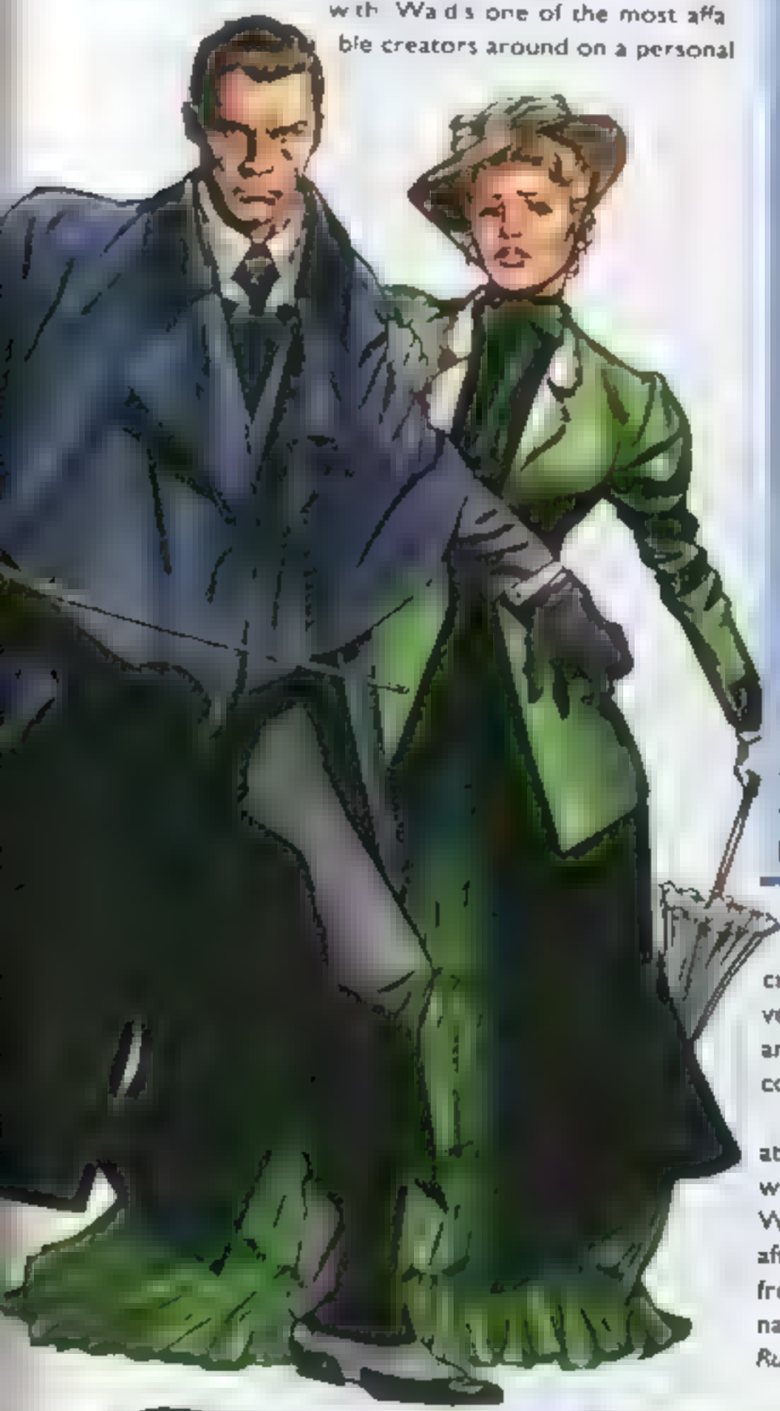
DC was in the process of shifting editorial responsibilities on the Superman books and the team's pitch was scuttled. Waid felt used and abused by the process and it was reportedly explained to him that the creators couldn't be a bigger draw than the Superman franchise and that he'd never write an ongoing Superman title. (DC Executive Editor Mike Carlin refused to comment.)

Crushed after losing the Superman job to Jeph Loeb and Joe Kelly, Waid continued to bounce around on a handful of titles at DC, never staying more than a handful of issues, until following up Morrison's run with an 18-issue stint on *JLA*. Waid decided it was time for a change. He always dreamed of becoming a power broker in comics, of wielding decision-making authority to help shape a company and now the opportunity presented itself. Fledgling company CrossGen had entered the fray talking a big game and throwing around money to lure creators to its hub of operations in Florida. When owner Mark Alessi came knockin', Waid was ready to listen.

NO FUN IN THE SUN

At the outset, the Waid/CrossGen marriage appeared to be a good fit.

Although he'd developed a reputation for being hard to work with, Waid's one of the most affable creators around on a personal level. He willingly gives of himself, sometimes spending hours talking to young writers looking for comic book work about the craft of writing for the medium. He is a frequent guest on the convention circuit, featured on panels both because of his quick wit and extensive knowledge (some would say borderline worship) of comic book history and continuity.



CrossGen's system of having the entire creative team in-house at their Florida headquarters was perfectly suited for Waid, who wanted a chance to mix his editorial experience with writing. But Waid quickly grew tired of the daily grind at CrossGen. One year after signing his exclusive agreement, Waid resigned to pursue other freelance opportunities. A few weeks later, Waid asked that his name be removed from the Harvey Awards ballot for his work on *Ruse*, much to the chagrin of CrossGen founder Alessi.

"I'm not saying working at CrossGen was a bad experience,"

FANTASTIC VOYAGE

Mark Waid [illegible] his tenure at *The Fantastic Four* will feature the unexpected. In fact, Waid has already shocked *FF* fans. Tom Brevoort

"In my first issue you learn something about [Mister Fantastic] you never knew," says Waid. "In the second issue you learn something new about [Human Torch]. And in the third issue something happens to [Invisible Woman] that Tom was shocked by because he said, 'This isn't the kind of thing that's supposed to happen in an FF story.' It's shocking and brutal. And that is what happens in *The FF* now."

Waid, who takes over *The Fantastic Four* along with artist Mike Wieringo with August's nine-cent issue #60, says that while he plans his run on *FF* to be full of surprises, don't expect this to be a revamp of any sort.

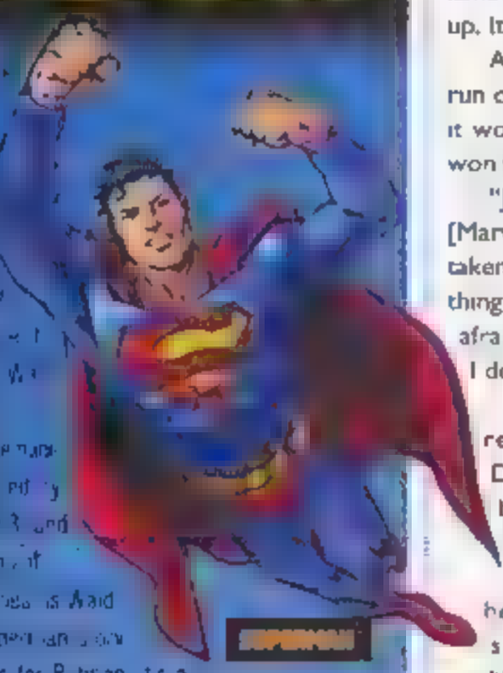
"I have nothing but respect for what's come before," explains Waid. "But I'm a lot more interested in adding to the mythos rather than just repeating the same thing over and over again.

"I love these characters too much to ever harm them but I do want to shake things up. These characters are so rich and deep, there're things we've never touched on before with each of them."

Waid is so intent on developing the individual characters of the Fantastic Four that there won't be an appearance by a villain until his third issue—and then it'll be a new villain, not a classic FF foe. But when a classic FF villain does materialize, it's the biggest and baddest of them all.

"In my sixth issue, Doctor Doom shows up but it's like you've never seen him before," teases Waid. "He literally looks different. I don't want to give anything away, but this is an idea that's never been done with Doom." And that, he promises. ■ MC

A SUPER NATURAL



Sure, there were issues of *JLA* and *Flash* penned by Waid [illegible] Marvel [illegible] the wonder [illegible] for [illegible] finally after [illegible] years [illegible]

Superman: Birthright [illegible] series written by Waid and penciled by [illegible] and [illegible] is excellent.

"It's a great [illegible]" says Waid [illegible] this to be the [illegible] Superman story [illegible] to be what *Dark Knight* is for Batman. It's a story you can hand to anyone and say, 'This is what Superman's about. Superman doesn't have that right now.'

The series will re-examine Superman from his roots on Krypton to growing up in Smallville to his role in Metropolis, according to Waid. In the story fans will see Clark Kent travel, including a stint in the Peace Corps in Africa.

"The first double-sized issue will probably be young Clark re-examining why he needs a Superman identity," reveals Waid. "Then we'll move him into Metropolis as Superman and examine his early days."

Waid admits his version of Superman may seem a little different for modern fans. But he says the story he's trying to tell falls more in line with the character Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster envisioned.

"We'll do things like introduce Luthor and Brainiac as the two main villains, but we'll also see Superman work at gaining the trust of Metropolis," says Waid. "It's not like the movies where people just embrace Superman. Superman isn't a Boy Scout in this story and I think that's the most radical departure. He's not a bad guy or jerk but the idea is to go back to 1938 where we had a guy who was a two-fisted champion of the oppressed." ■ MC

A FANTASTIC FINISH

The chance to return to Marvel and author one of the most famous superteams in comics' history was too great for Waid to pass up. It was also an intimidating opportunity.

As Waid and artist Mike Wieringo embark on a highly anticipated run on *The Fantastic Four* this July (see sidebar), Waid's still scared it won't be good enough—that his take on Marvel's First Family won't live up to the hype surrounding it.

"Just after I signed my CrossGen contract, I had lunch with [Marvel Editor-in-Chief] Joe Quesada," recollects Waid. "He'd just taken the editor-in-chief job at Marvel and he offered me everything I'd ever wanted to write and I had to turn him down. I was afraid I might never get a shot at something like it again. Now that I do— I'm a little worried I don't deserve it."

Deserve it? Waid's constructed hits like *Kingdom Come* revived failing titles like *Flash* and taken on both Marvel and DC like the class geek finally standing up to the schoolyard bully. And yet, he's still insecure—and that fear is exactly what keeps him going.

Waid's not just playing the role of insecure writer and he's not falsely modest— he truly believes his track record is dubious.

"I still wonder if this'll be the one where they finally tell me it's all been a big joke," says Waid warily. "They'll read an issue and say 'Hey Mark, the jig is up. That's what I'm scared of."

But Waid admits it's the fear that keeps him writing, too. So maybe it's not such a bad thing—perhaps it's exactly what he needs. And maybe it's also exactly what he wants. W

Staff Writer [illegible]

asserts Waid. "But I had my name removed for personal reasons and they're going to remain private."

Insiders say Waid's departure was nowhere near as nice as Waid would have you believe. Numerous sources say Waid and Alessi argued for days about the writer's resignation and the discussions ended in a near physical confrontation. Alessi refused to comment on Waid's tenure at CrossGen.

But as Waid moved back into the freelance circle, he found a brand-new Marvel waiting for him with open arms.

FANTASTIC FOUR: Waid is unsure of how his *FF* run will be received, but if his track record is any indication, it should be on the Mark

CONTEST OF
ASHLEY
PARK

CHAMPIONS

Gearing up for the two hottest relaunch events of the summer, WIZARD pits 'Fantastic Four' against 'Avengers' for super-team supremacy

Forget Galactus and the Masters of Evil. This August, the greatest challenge facing the Avengers and the Fantastic Four is each other.

Over the course of their legendary territories, both the Avengers and the Fantastic Four have trounced the worst that the Marvel Universe could throw at them. But thanks to some high-profile revamps, the House of Ideas' two most powerful super-groups are set to go toe to toe for the undisputed title of Marvel's Premier Superteam.

In this corner: The Avengers, once again poised for greatness courtesy of new writer Geoff Johns and artist Kieron Dwyer. Johns, hot on the heels of his acclaimed runs on *JSA* and *The Flash*, blasts onto the title with issue #57, promising fans all the senses-shattering action that the A-Team can administer. "They're the greatest heroes in the Marvel Universe," exclaims Johns. "My goal is to continue the tradition of the Avengers kicking ass across the world and beyond."

And in the other corner: the First Family of Marvel, a.k.a. The Fantastic Four. Debuting with a nine cent issue #60, the former *Flash* dream team of Mark Waid and Mike Wieringo plan on putting the fantastic back into the FF. And while that task may seem daunting, the veteran Waid is charging full speed ahead on his latest endeavor. "They're the premier comic in the Marvel Universe," he says. "It's our job to return them to the status they deserve."

This bout to knock the other book out tears through five bone-crushing rounds: Characters, Writers, Artists, Marketing and Popularity. "We want a clear fight. No biting, no hitting below the belt and no Ultimate Nullifiers. Let's get it on!"

BY JAMES MCDONAGH

Marvel characters © Marvel Characters, Inc.

ROUND ONE: THE CHARACTERS

THE AVENGERS Even though they're Marvel's answer to the Justice League, the Avengers are a team with few equals. Consisting of heavy hitters like Captain America and Iron Man, the Avengers' roster reads like an all-star list of the Marvel Universe. This A-list squad is a superpowered police force that eats supervillains for breakfast, laying the smackdown on threats like the heartless killing machine Ultron and the time-travelling conqueror Kang.

THE FANTASTIC FOUR Using their cosmic ray-induced powers to thwart the evil conquests of no-goodniks like the dreaded Doctor Doom, the team of Mister Fantastic, Invisible Woman, Human Torch and the Thing are as loveable as they are powerful.

And while possessing some of the coolest superpowers this side of the Cosmic Cube, it's these superhumans' humanity that makes them so fantastic. Whether it's Sue and Reed Richards trying to raise the most powerful mutant on the planet or the pseudo-sibling rivalry between the Human Torch and the Thing, the FF is a family first and foremost.

THE VERDICT While we don't want to be the guys to look Ben Grimm in the baby blues and tell him, we can't deny the star power of the Avengers. With a roster that boasts icons like Cap and Shellhead among its members, it's hard not to get swept up in the overwhelming coolness of the Avengers. Without a doubt, these guys are the major leagues of the Marvel Universe.

THE WINNER: Avengers

ROUND 2: THE ARTISTS

THE AVENGERS Never resting on his laurels, Kieron Dwyer's done an amazing job of elevating his art style to the epic scope that *Avengers* calls for. Unfortunately his run on the book ends with issue #60. However, fans shouldn't cry just yet, as Gary Frank of *Midnight Nation* fame hops on aboard for issues #61 and #62, while veteran artist Alan Davis follows with #63. After that, things seem to pretty much be up in the air. "Nothing is official yet, but hopefully we'll be announcing something soon," indicates Johns.

THE FANTASTIC FOUR "Mike has that Kirby energy," enthuses Waid. "But he also has that John Romita Sr. ability to make characters warm and accessible. And frankly, he makes Sue Richards hot—not bad for a soccer mom. Strong praises indeed—but definitely well deserved. Wieringo's hip, energetic style is a perfect blend of class and substance. Plus, he knows his way around icons, having worked on Spider-Man and Superman in the past."

THE VERDICT While a team consisting of Davis, Dwyer and Frank is almost as impressive as the Avengers' roster, the book's lack of a regular artist leaves *Avengers* at a serious disadvantage. Boding well for the FF, Ringo's past work on iconic characters has helped him generate quite the fanbase over the years. The bottom line? While the FF's suits may be made of unstable molecules, providing readers with a stable look and style gives *Fantastic Four* the edge needed to take this category.

THE WINNER: Fantastic Four

CLASH OF THE ICONS: Standing up for their fearless leader, Dwyer's Cap commands respect, while Ringo's Thing commands his knuckles.

ROUND 3: THE WRITERS

THE AVENGERS Ironically, it's writer Geoff Johns' sense of what's cool that makes his work so hot. From transforming DC's *JSA* from a geriatric team of fogies into a generation-spanning group of icons that command respect, to morphing the Flash's rogues gallery from foolish to downright frightening—Johns knows how to make superheroes demand respect. Is there really anyone more qualified to usher Marvel's flagship team into the new millennium?

THE FANTASTIC FOUR A hitmaker in his own right, veteran writer Mark Waid has worked his magic on many of comics' biggest names. He co-created the wildly successful *Kingdom Come* with Alex Ross, re-established the Flash as one of DC's premier superheroes and even helped a new generation of fans discover *Captain America* during a time when the industry was up to its ears in mutants and bad girl knockoffs. Currently he's gaining critical acclaim for his work on *Ruse*, which by no coincidence is one of CrossGen's best selling titles.

THE VERDICT While Waid's uncanny ability to create comic gold is something no one can deny, Johns—comics' newest golden boy—shows no signs of cooling off. Take one look at his impressive track record and you'll see why. Anyone who could make us give a crap about Hawkman again has got our vote!

THE WINNER: Avengers

ROUND FOUR: MARKETING

THE AVENGERS Earth's Mightiest Heroes made an exclusive appearance in Earth's mightiest comic magazine. *Wizard* #130 gave fans a sneak peak at *Avengers* #57 in its entirety, presenting this explosive debut to hundreds of thousands of comic fans. It's the law of averages—the more people who see your product, the more chances of finding people who'll dig it.

THE FANTASTIC FOUR Nine cents for 22 pages of funny book—sounds like a steal to us!

With one of the most generous marketing moves since *Batman: The 10-Cent Adventure*, even the thriftiest fan has no excuse not to snatch up the first issue of *Fantastic Four* #60. Pennies on the dollar already proved a hit with said Bat-book, as well as a recent 13-penny-priced issue of *Gen*

THE VERDICT Offering people a comic for nine cents is pretty much a no-brainer. How could any fanboy worth his salt resist the urge to get a brand-new comic for less than a phone call? Even Waid's marvelous competition knows a good deal when he sees one. "I can't wait to buy my 50 copies of the nine-cent *Fantastic Four*," gushes Johns. It just doesn't get any better for frugal fanboys.

THE WINNER: **Fantastic Four**

ROUND FIVE: POPULARITY

THE AVENGERS When it comes to the dedication of legions of die-hard fans, the Avengers are untouchable.

"Avengers fans tend to be dedicated and are in it for the long haul," comments *Avengers* and *Fantastic Four* editor Tom Brevoort. "Over the years, Avengers fans have sat through a lot of mediocre to bad comics because they really love these characters. There's just something about seeing all these heroes in action together."

With its amazing roster of Marvel icons like Captain America, Iron Man and Thor, this superhero version of the NBA Dream Team commands the undying loyalty of Marvel zombies.

THE FANTASTIC FOUR One of Marvel's most recognizable institutions, the FF has been kicking butt and taking names for decades. Honestly, what self-respecting Marvel fan doesn't list that ever-lovin' blue-eyed Thing as one of their favorite superheroes? "There's a predisposition to wanting to like the FF," notes Brevoort. "Whether fans have read the book for two years or 10 years—even if they read it avidly—it seems like that's a book everyone wants to like."

THE VERDICT Though it's a tough call, even *Fantastic Four* writer Mark Waid agrees it's difficult to beat a book with this much star power. "You kind of have to like the FF to be an FF fan," concedes Waid. "But if you like Captain America, you like *Avengers*... if you like Iron Man, you like *Avengers*...etc., etc. *Avengers* certainly has a broader fanbase because they bring in readers from all the other books."

THE WINNER: **Avengers**

AND THE TITLE GOES TO...

It was quite the superhero showdown, but it's Earth's Mightiest Heroes who walk away with the big "W" here, taking a well-earned three of the five categories from this titanic tussle. While the venerable FF proved to be the worthiest of adversaries, the A-Team's combination of red-hot writing, iconic characters and undying fan loyalty gives them the muscle needed to lay claim to the top spot. But both Johns and Waid agree: This isn't really about competition between the two books—it's the fans that win in the long run. 'Nuff said!

THE WINNER: **Avengers**

IT'S CLOBBERIN' TIME!

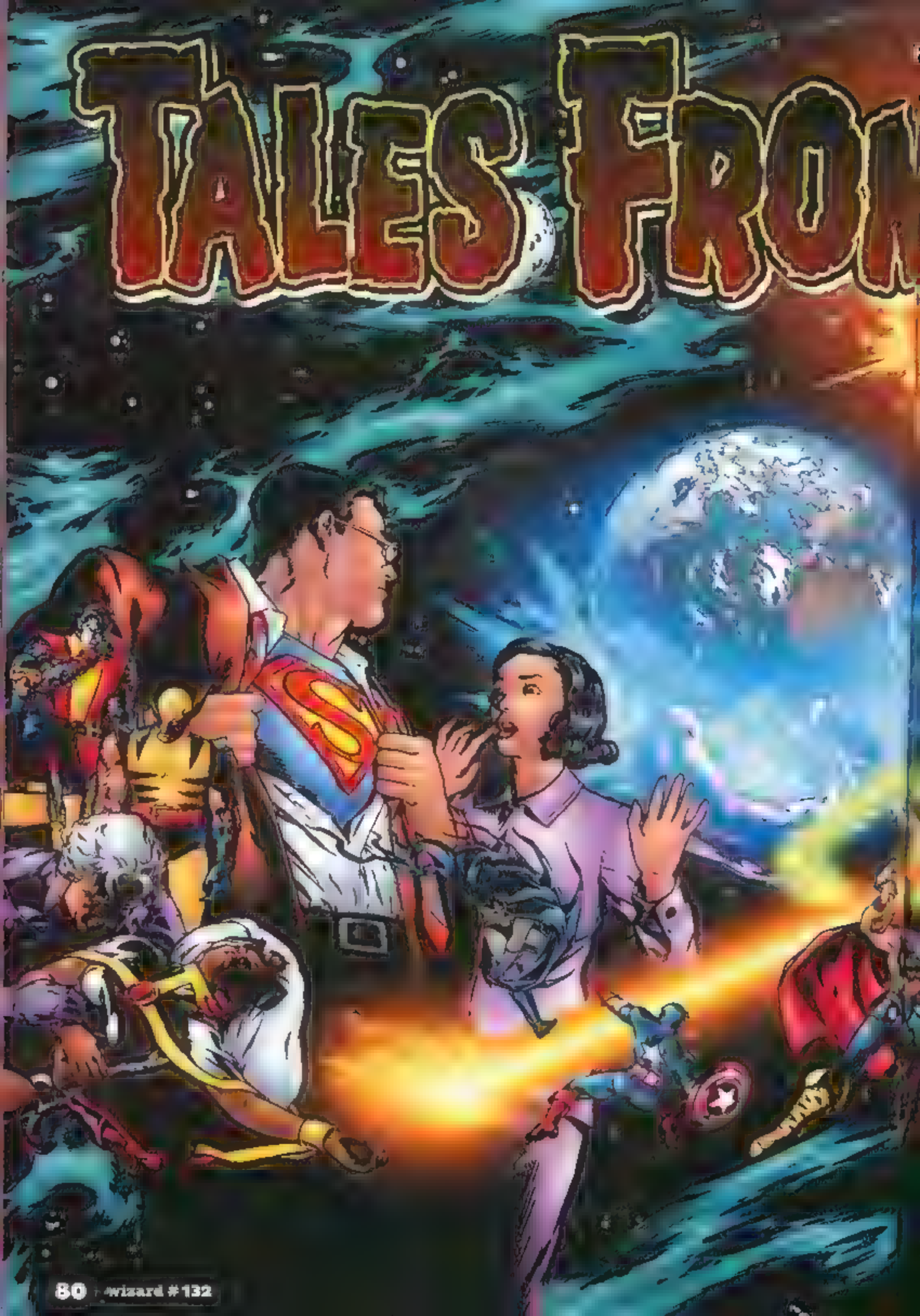
The Avengers: Earth's Mightiest Heroes and way cooler than the Defenders.

The Fantastic Four: heroic explorers of the unknown and owners of really cool stuff.

But which team is better? Screw all that official mucky-muck in the feature. Here are the real deciding factors on which super-team reigns supreme.

AVENGERS	FANTASTIC FOUR
HEADQUARTER TOMFOOLERY	
Moved their mansion to inflatable island, sank **WINNER: Avengers**	Skyscraper home launched into space, blown up by a 9-year-old German boy
COOL GADGET	
ID card that lets you commandeer planes, access government files, kill drifters, etc **WINNER: Avengers**	Snug-yet unstable-pants.
BABE FACTOR	
Scarlet Witch, a redheaded gypsy who has sex with robots	Sue Richards, a [illegible] and natural blonde **WINNER: The MILF**
MOST QUESTIONABLE MEMBER	
D-Man, a homeless superhero with winning eBay bids on vintage Daredevil costumes **WINNER: Avengers**	HERBIE the living, [illegible] computer
PLAYA HATERS	
Masters of Evil, though-while indeed evil-none possess an actual master's degree	Dr. Doom, though-while his last name really is Doom-he isn't really a doctor **WINNER: FF**
HOLLYWOOD SQUARES	
English TV show about a guy in a derby.	Direct-to-video flick that may have been a high school play
WINNER: Tie	

■ PAT McCALLUM


TALES FROM

BY MIKE COTTON

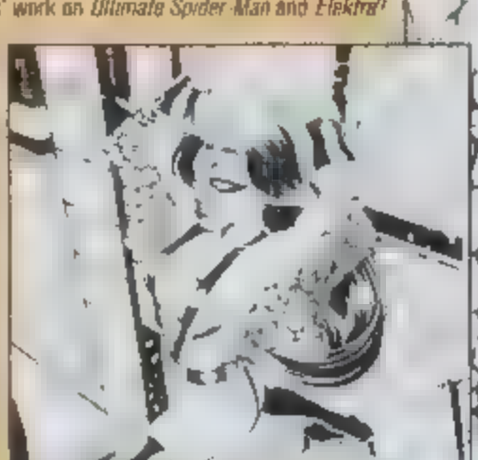
THE CRYPT

WIZARD uncovers the 10 greatest comic book stories never told!

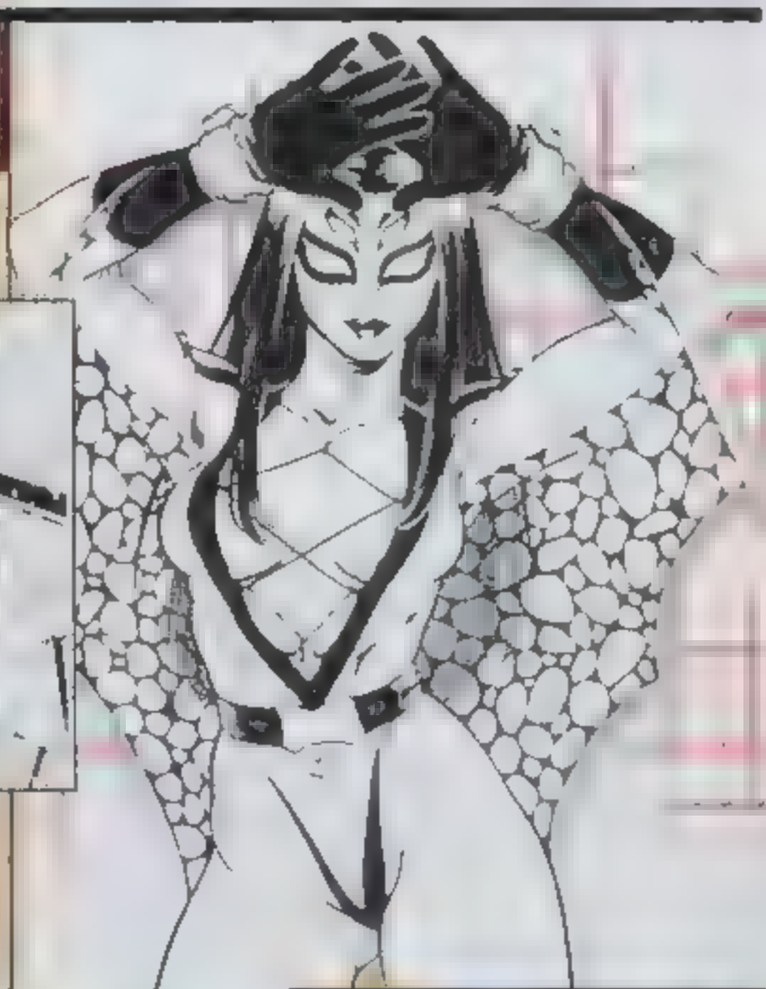
THINK THE ONLY THING THAT STAYS DEAD IN COMICS IS UNCLE BEN? THINK AGAIN. ♦ Editors, publishers and creators kill hundreds of stories every year—but some of the biggest, most intriguing tales refuse to go quietly into their grave. These are stories so big, so Earth-shaking and so controversial, most comic book pros and publishers never wanted any fan to read them. Some were locked away in high-security archives, some sat covered in dust deep in a creator's basement for a decade, others float freely around the Internet—but no matter where they came from, one thing's for sure—they were never supposed to be heard from again. ♦ Some of these stories forced creators to bolt books, resulted in bad blood and in one case, began a decade-long legal battle. ♦ "Stories get tanked by companies for all kinds of reasons," says writer Grant Morrison, who once pitched a radical new direction for Superman and was denied. "Maybe the editor doesn't agree with your take on a character, maybe someone doesn't like the tone of your story, maybe they think you're hurting the integrity of the character. It's totally subjective." ♦ Imagine a comic where DC's Captain Marvel is a pervert, Magneto moves the Earth out of orbit, Spider-Woman works for S.H.I.E.L.D., The Authority kills Jesus Christ or Superman reveals to Lois he's Clark Kent—in 1940! It all could have happened and more. ♦ *Wizard* dug through tons of files, pestered comics' top creators and even went deep undercover to find the 10 greatest stories pitched but never published. ♦ Factoring in everything from the creative team who pitched it to the reason it was torpedoed, we ranked the pitches and discovered whether or not the books will ever see print. ♦ Think you know comics? Think again. These are the stories no one's had the balls to talk about—until now.

10. ULTIMATE SPIDER-WOMAN

THE PLAYERS Writer Brian Michael Bendis and artist Rick Mays
THE PROJECT *Spider-Woman of S.H.I.E.L.D.*
THE STORY Like Brian Michael Bendis' work on *Ultimate Spider-Man* and *Elektra*? Then maybe you would have picked up *Spider-Woman of S.H.I.E.L.D.* Way back in 1995, before he hit it big with *Ultimate Spider-Man*, Bendis signed on with Marvel West Coast, a now-defunct West Coast office of Marvel Comics, to write the series. "It played on a lot of the same themes as *Elektra* did," says Bendis. She was this reluctant agent of S.H.I.E.L.D. working on the cases normal agents couldn't handle.



West Coast office closed down just after the project was approved, leaving Bendis and Mays with no one to publish the story. It took Bendis another five years before he got a shot at Marvel's East Coast main office with *Ultimate Spider-Man*.
WILL IT EVER HAPPEN: "I hope not," chuckles Bendis. "I reread it a while ago and it's not very good. I took a few ideas from it and some of it became the first arc of *Elektra*, but I don't think you'll see it anytime soon."

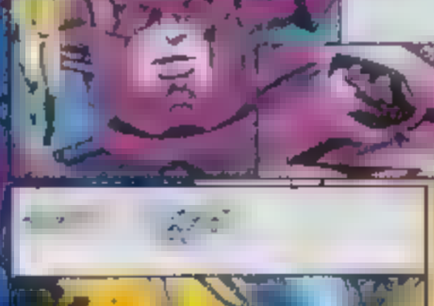


SPY GAME If Brian Michael Bendis had had his way, Spider-Woman would be schlepping for S.H.I.E.L.D.

9. DEATH OF GALACTUS

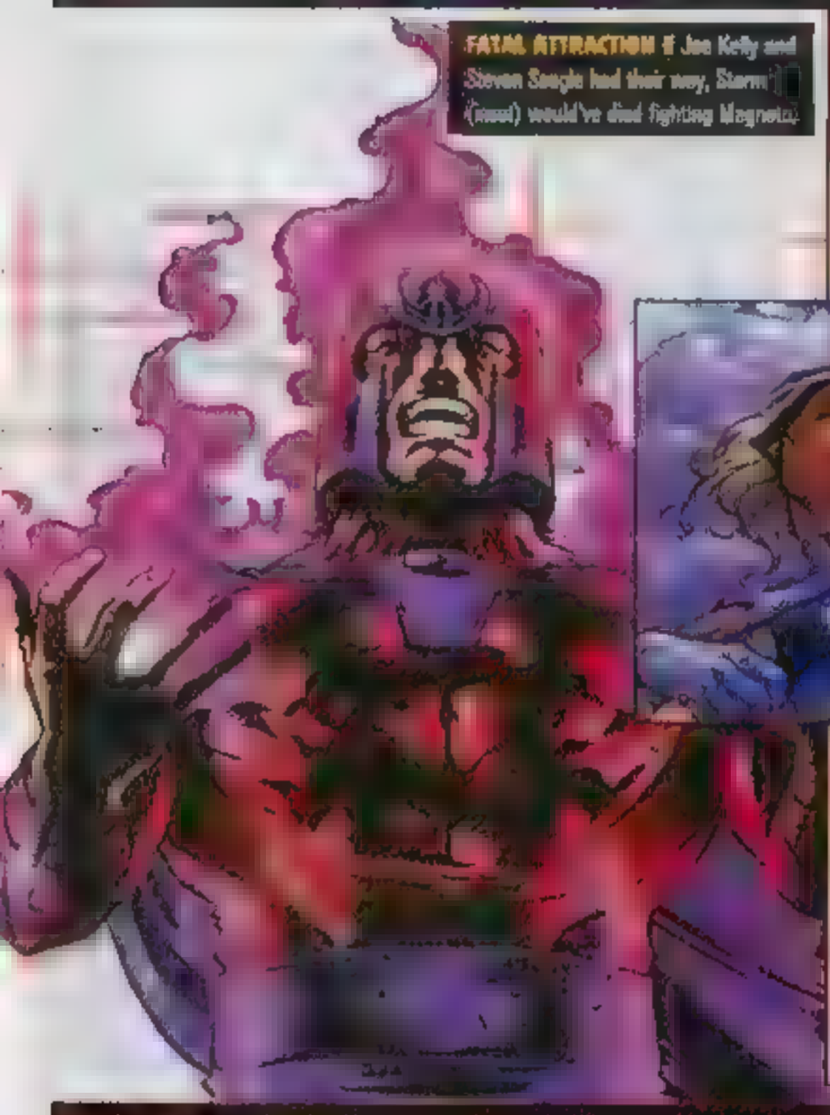
THE PLAYERS Writer John Byrne and artist Terry Austin
THE PROJECT *The Last Galactus Story*
THE STORY Beginning in Marvel's now-defunct *Epic Illustrated* magazine, "The Last Galactus Story" revolves around Galactus returning to Earth thousands of years in the future to devour it long after everyone on Earth is dead. After gorging on the planet, Galactus discovers something has begun moving both planets and stars into a pattern. He finally confronts the being responsible, a rogue Watcher who actually witnessed the birth of Galactus billions of years earlier.

That's where the tale ended in *Epic Illustrated*, but Byrne planned for the rogue Watcher and Galactus to fight each other for millions if not billions of years, expending vast amounts of cosmic energy over the next several issues. The story would have then culminated with Galactus realizing that the energy from his fight will eventually destroy the entire universe. At that point, Galactus consumes all the energy around him and destroys the Watcher with it. Still filled with energy, Galactus' last act is to crack open his own helmet and release the energy inside him, creating a "big bang" that births the next universe.



WHY IT NEVER HAPPENED: In February of 1986, *Epic Illustrated* ceased publication and Byrne's epic Galactus story was never finished, leaving fans with the cliffhanger of Galactus confronting the Watcher who says, "Has it been so long you no longer recall the face of the one who created you?"
WILL IT EVER HAPPEN: "I've always said I'd only feel comfortable finishing the story if I was doing *Fantastic Four* because it's so much an integral part of the FF mythos," Byrne told *Wizard* in 1993. After Byrne's recent spats with Marvel over the cancellation of his *X-Men: The Hidden Years* series, don't expect the creator to return to the FF anytime soon.

CURRENT POINT Imagine a story where Galactus not only devours Earth, but eventually wipes out the universe.



FATAL ATTRACTION If Joe Kelly and Steven Seagle had their way, Storm (most) would've died fighting Magneto.

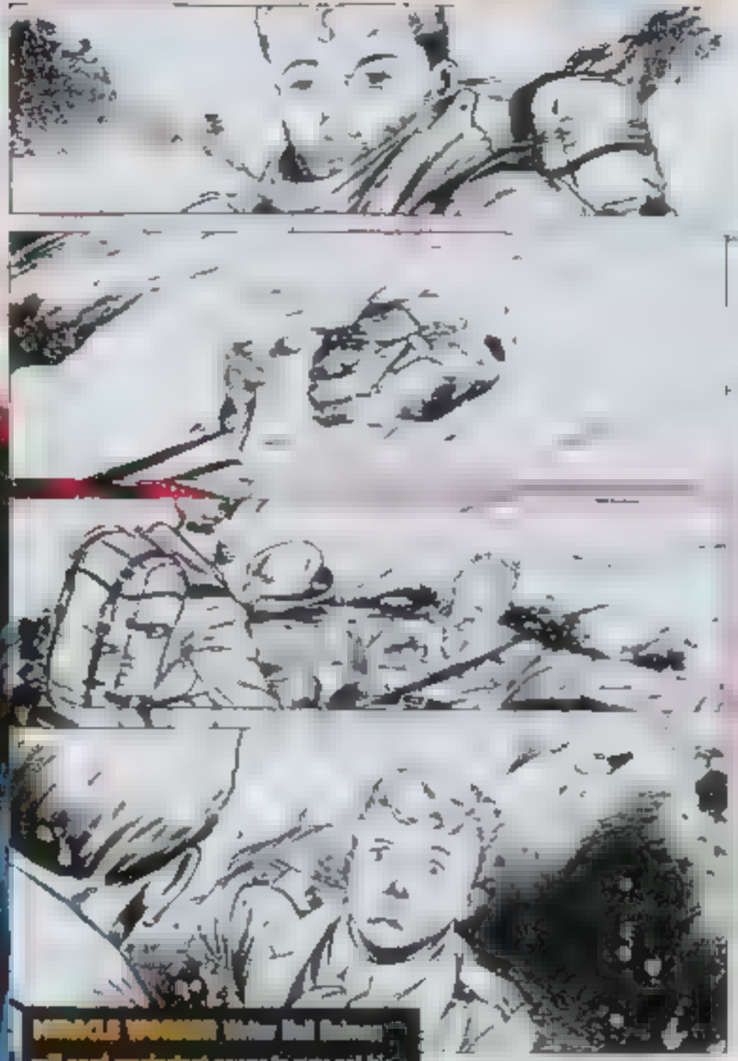
8. MAGNETO TAKES OVER THE WORLD

THE PLAYERS: Writers Joe Kelly and Steven Seagle
THE PROJECT: X-Men
THE STORY: Waking up in a mutant concentration camp, the X-Men finally realize the horror, helplessness and fear Magneto felt at the hands of Nazis during World War II—that is until Magneto reveals he's the one behind their imprisonment! Explaining to the X-Men that he only planned to show them what the world could be like for mutants if they didn't act, Magneto uses his vast magnetic powers to tilt the Earth on its axis. Climates around the world change, and the entire planet finds itself in disarray. A rift divides the X-Men after their liberation from Magneto's camp with some X-Men siding with Magneto and some against him. Magneto, who threatens to throw the planet into the sun if his demand to the United Nations for a mutant nation is not met, hides the fact that he's used up all his powers and is almost helpless. As the X-Men and Magneto square off, Storm taps all her powers to normalize the entire planet's weather and dies in the process, making the X-Men's victory over Magneto bittersweet.
WHY IT NEVER HAPPENED: At the time, Marvel felt the story by Kelly and Seagle was too edgy for the main X-Men books. "With the concentration camps and Storm dying we knew there would be issues," says Kelly.
WILL IT EVER HAPPEN: Probably not, and that's the way Kelly likes it. "Today, the X-Men books are doing stuff edgier, more powerful and more based on current events than even we wanted to do."

7. GAIMAN'S MIRACLEMAN FINALE

THE PLAYERS: Writer Neil Gaiman and artist Mark Buckingham
THE PROJECT: *Miracleman: The Silver Age* and *The Dark Age*
THE STORY: Neil Gaiman needed a miracle. Luckily Alan Moore had one to spare—or at least a Miracleman.

After completing his run on the revamped and much more violent *Miracleman* series, Moore turned writing duties over to a pre-*Sandman* Gaiman, who began but never completed his "The Silver Age" storyarc. The series would have seen Young Miracleman return and find flaws in the utopian society created by Miracleman. The second chapter by Gaiman, entitled "The Dark Age," would have then seen the return of the murderous and crazed Kid Miracleman, whom Miracleman killed in battle in *Miracleman* #15. "From there, things just continued to get worse," teases Gaiman.
WHY IT NEVER HAPPENED: Eclipse Comics, which owned the U.S. publishing rights, went belly-up in the mid-1990s, and the rights to Miracleman became a bone of contention. Gaiman and *Spawn* creator Todd McFarlane, who acquired the entire library of Eclipse characters, are now locked in a legal battle to finally decide who owns Miracleman once and for all.
WILL IT EVER HAPPEN: "I don't know," says Gaiman. *Miracleman* #25 is all finished—has been for a very long time—and it's a story I'd love to tell. I'm afraid it all depends on the current court case."



MIRACLE WORKER When Neil Gaiman will need exceptional power to ever get his lost Miracleman story off the ground.

6. ALEX ROSS TURNS EVIL

THE PLAYERS: Painter Alex Ross and writer Paul Dini

THE PROJECT: *Portraits of Villainy*

THE STORY: Alex Ross really wanted to do something bad.

After their highly successful tabloid projects, *Superman: Peace on Earth* and *Batman: War on Crime*, Ross and Dini wanted to do a coffee table book with 30 portraits of DC Comics' top villains painted by Ross with Dini supplying the opposite page's text written in first-person "voice" of that villain. In Gorilla Grodd's case, the text would have consisted of a simple grunt. Others villains would retell their origins or specific encounters with DC heroes. In the Joker's case, the Clown Prince of Crime would have explained his origin in the form of a joke.

WHY IT NEVER HAPPENED: In the end, it came down to money. According to Ross and Dini, while DC's editorial department loved the idea of the project, the powers-that-be didn't see the project being profitable enough to warrant its expense. After months of trying to get the project approved, it was eventually scuttled, with Ross moving on to focus on Marvel work like *Earth X*, *Universe X* and now *Paradise X*.

WILL IT EVER HAPPEN: "I hope so," says Ross. "I'd still love to do this for DC and I have a similar plan for a Marvel project. If we could work everything out and I was free of other commitments, I'd definitely do it."

PICKING UP STEAM: Alex Ross was so jazzed about this *Portraits of Villainy* project, he produced all these amazing pencilled sketches for the pitch.

5. SWAMP THING MEETS CHRIST

THE PLAYERS: Writer Rick Veitch and artist Michael Zulli

THE PROJECT: *Swamp Thing* #88

THE STORY: Swamp Thing hadn't been home in a while. Writer Rick Veitch, who took the series over from Alan Moore (*Watchmen*), had sent Swamp Thing on a journey through time where he met significant historical figures such as Adolf Hitler, King Arthur and Merlin. In one of the final pieces of the story, Swamp Thing journeyed back to meet Jesus Christ. Over the course of the story, Swamp Thing tries to fight off the Roman guards set on capturing Jesus, fills the Holy Grail with the sweetest nectar he can produce and then watches Jesus crucified before slipping back into the time stream.

WHY IT NEVER HAPPENED: DC has shied away from talking about specifics of why *Swamp Thing* #88 was never published. It's speculated that with the impending release of 1989's "Batman" movie just months away, DC and its parent company Time Warner didn't want any negative publicity surrounding comics. Although the story was handled "with integrity and respect," DC President Jenette Kahn told *The Wall Street Journal* at the time, "the concept itself" would offend many readers.

WILL IT EVER HAPPEN: "DC and I have come to a reconciliation of sorts," says Veitch, who bolted from DC when *Swamp Thing* #88 was canned in 1989 and, until recently, had sworn never to work for DC again. Veitch has been tapped to pen a new *Aquaman* series for the publisher and says, "There's even talk of maybe finally publishing *Swamp Thing* #88." Amen

PERSONAL CRUSADE: DC put the kibosh on Swamp Thing meeting Jesus Christ, deeming it too offensive.

AUTHORITY VS. JESUS

THE PLAYERS: Writer Brian Azzarello and artist Steve Dillon

THE PROJECT: *The Authority* vol. 2

THE STORY: The Authority needed a new villain—luckily Brian Azzarello had a perfect one—the Son of God. After The *Authority* team of Mark Millar and Frank Quitely announced they would leave the title in May 2001, WildStorm signed Azzarello and Dillon to relaunch the series with a new number one and mature-reader tag on the front cover. Azzarello and Dillon planned a six- to eight-issue run on the title, which would have had Christ return to Earth and take on the Authority, who he believed represented the anti-Christ. Reportedly in a final battle, the Authority actually killed Jesus Christ!

WHY IT NEVER HAPPENED: After the events of Sept. 11, both the creative team and DC Comics felt the *Authority*'s brand of ultra-violent superheroes was inappropriate, and both Azzarello and Dillon dropped out of the project. Insiders at WildStorm also say that DC executives never appreciated the Batman and Superman knock-offs, Midnighter and Apollo, being homosexual lovers and that they welcomed an end to the series. Reportedly, a new series of mini-series will feature the Authority, but expect less on-screen violence and homosexual activity in future stories.

WILL IT EVER HAPPEN: Now that Azzarello has signed an exclusive deal with DC, many fans might be hopeful that his Authority reboot could happen. Azzarello isn't as hopeful, though. "No," says Azzarello flatly before softening his stance. "Well, you never know, right? If I say I'd never do it, who knows? Later on I might. But right now I'm not really doing superhero stuff. So it won't happen anytime soon."

[illegible] a story, as DC execs didn't take kindly to The Authority killing Jesus.

1983's JLA/AVENGERS

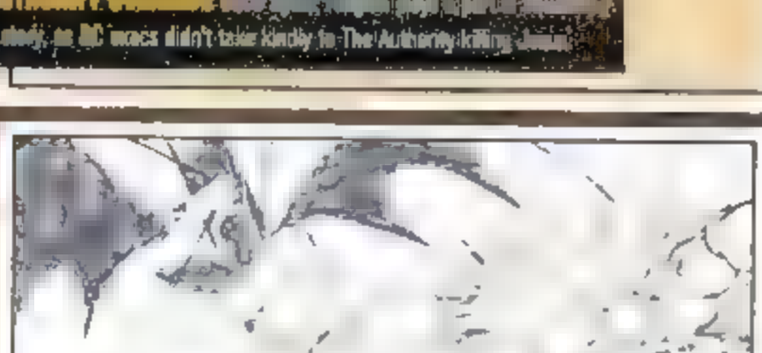
THE PLAYERS: Writer Gerry Conway and artist George Pérez

THE PROJECT: *JLA/Avengers*

THE STORY: In early 1983, writer Gerry Conway plotted out a *JLA/Avengers* one-shot to be drawn by George Perez. The original story dealt with Marvel's villainous Kang and the Lord of Time from DC continuity going to the dawn of time and trying to reset history by creating a single, unified Earth. The new world would've been created in either Kang's or the Lord of Time's own image, depending on who won the prize. The story dealt with the "The Eggs of Time," which were little bits of time shot through the time continuum to be retrieved in various points of history. Kang uses the Avengers as his agents by stating that the Justice League are actually villains trying to get the Eggs for the Lord of Time, with the reverse happening with the Lord of Time, who tells the Justice League the same thing. The Avengers and the JLA were then going to be sent to different times in different locations to get the Eggs, allowing for various confrontations between Superman and Thor, Quicksilver and Flash, the Red Tornado and the Vision and Batman taking on Captain America.

WHY IT NEVER HAPPENED: Soon after Conway finalized his plot, and Roy Thomas came in to rework certain parts of the story, Marvel and DC pulled the plug on the project when they couldn't come to terms as to how some of the battles between the two company's top characters would end. Reportedly, Marvel didn't like some of their biggest characters losing to second-tier DC heroes.

WILL IT EVER HAPPEN: With the current *JLA/Avengers* mini-series by Kurt Busiek and Pérez planned for sometime in 2003, co-editor Tom Brevoort says there's always the possibility that the plot and early pages from the original *JLA/Avengers* might be included in a hardcover or trade paperback collection. "It's been casually mentioned, but we're nowhere near worrying about a collection at this point—our focus is on getting the series done," asserts Brevoort. "We'll figure out what to put in the collection once we're there."



MISSING IN ACTION

Other comic book stories never told

KEVIN SMITH'S B&B Now that Kevin Smith has signed an exclusive deal with Marvel, the writer says he'd still like to pursue his anticipated *Brave and the Bold* series starring Batman for DC. For now, the series will remain in his imagination.

MOORE'S MARVEL SPOOF One of the most promised image projects of 1993, Alan Moore's *1963* mini-series parodied Marvel's 1960s hyperbole and flair, even going so far to be drawn in a retro style. The finale, titled *1963 Annual*, was planned to be illustrated in a "modern" style by Jim Lee, Rob Liefeld and others. There are no plans for Moore's finished script to be illustrated.

SEX DETECTIVES Writer Garth Ennis has said he'd only return to the world of his Vertigo series *Preacher* in a Sex Detectives one-shot. Starring two bumbling Pl. fetishists, Ennis says, "The powers that be at DC still deem it too rude to print, and until they relent, there'll be no nice, big money-spinning *Preacher* logos for anyone."

POST-COLUMBINE KILLING Planned as [illegible] #141, writer Warren Ellis and artist Phil Jimenez explored the rash of school shootings in the U.S. as mystical rogue John Constantine gets involved with a psychologist writing a U.S. Senate report on the events. The issue was pulled by DC in the wake of the Columbine school shooting in 1999.

JOHNS' FIRESTORM When DC Comics was [illegible] Firestorm back into the spotlight, *JSA* writer Geoff Johns had the idea to bond the Nuclear Man with his brainy ex-girlfriend, who would take the place of the hero's former partner Professor Martin Stein. "Imagine your girlfriend in your head," shudders Johns. The series was shelved when DC decided to reintroduce Firestorm in *JLA* instead.

CENSORED BY NAZIS With a [illegible] how the Red Skull evolved from bellboy to Nazi, writer Mark Waid's 1998 script was rewritten by Marvel Editorial because it was seen as too sympathetic to the Nazi point of view. Angered, Waid quit the title, and subsequently Marvel, as a result.

SHOOTER'S KORVAC 2 Former Marvel Editor-in-Chief and *Avengers* legend Jim Shooter had recently pitched the publisher on a sequel to his fondly remembered "Korvac Saga," where the Avengers fought a tragic god-like being. But Shooter and Marvel could not agree on the tale's direction, and the sequel was scuttled.

ELLIS' KILLRAVEN In 1996, writer Warren Ellis pitched Marvel on a *Killraven* mini-series reviving the character as a political terrorist fighting the Martians ruling over Earth.

DARK PHOENIX LIVES Originally, Dark Phoenix was supposed to live at the end of *Uncanny X-Men* #137, but then-Editor-in-Chief Jim Shooter felt Jean Grey got off too easy. In a twist, this original ending was actually published long ago as *Phoenix: The Untold Story*. The second page of the one-shot compared *Uncanny* #138's actual first page with Jean's funeral eulogy and the first page that could-have-been of Jean admiring a beautiful flower ■ MC

2. ALAN MOORE'S WATCHMEN FOLLOW-UP

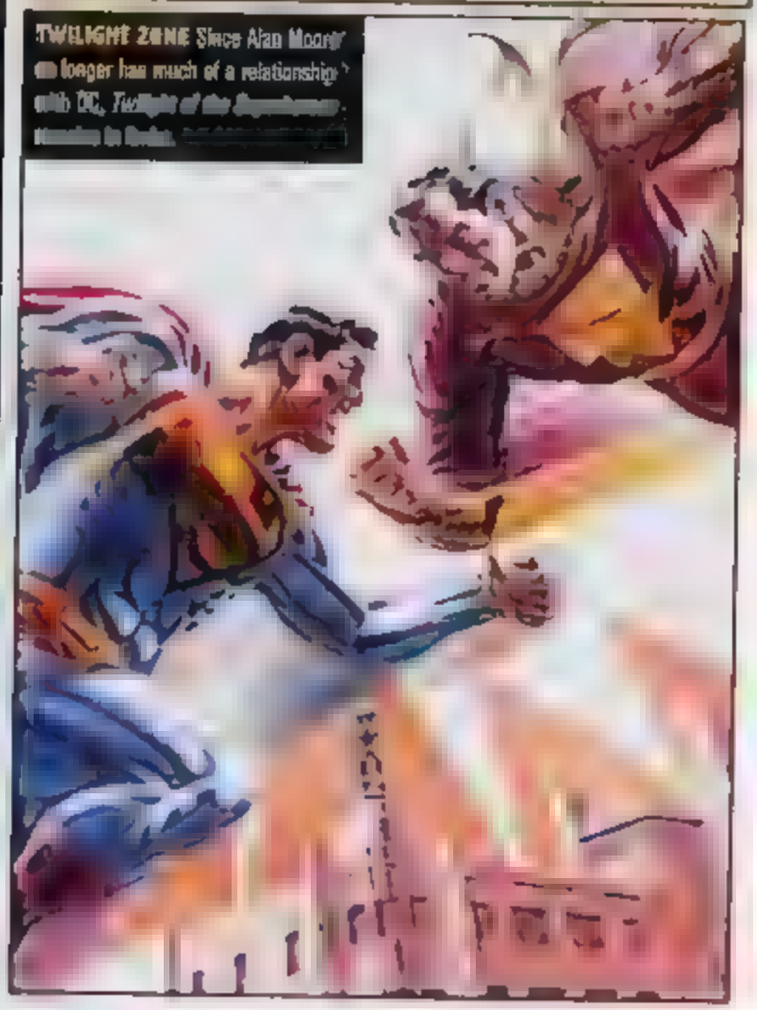
THE PLAYERS: Writer Alan Moore and artist Dave Gibbons

THE PROJECT: Twilight of the Superheroes

THE STORY: Imagine *Kingdom Come* almost eight years early and much, much darker in what was supposed to be Moore and Gibbons' follow-up to 1986-87's *Watchmen*. Moore crafted a proposal that had *Hellblazer*'s mystical rogue John Constantine receive a message from the future detailing an event that would lead to either the death or exile of every superhero on the planet. As Constantine works to prevent events from unfolding as described in the letter, the story reveals that in the future, superheroes are the new gods of Earth. Most heroes have divided into "houses" such as the "House of Steel" that contains Superman, his wife Wonder Woman and their two offspring, a sadistic new Superboy and Supergirl. Also in play is the "House of Lightning," containing the Marvel family, which plans an alliance with the House of Steel when Superboy marries Mary Marvel Jr. As the ceremony draws closer, all hell breaks loose when the remaining JLAers and Titans attack the wedding to stop the two houses from merging and becoming unstoppable. The blood flows freely as Wonder Woman kills Donna Troy, and most of the JLA is wiped out by Superman. And in one of the most shocking endings ever, Captain Marvel's revealed to be the Martian Manhunter, who murdered Marvel and has been impersonating him for years!

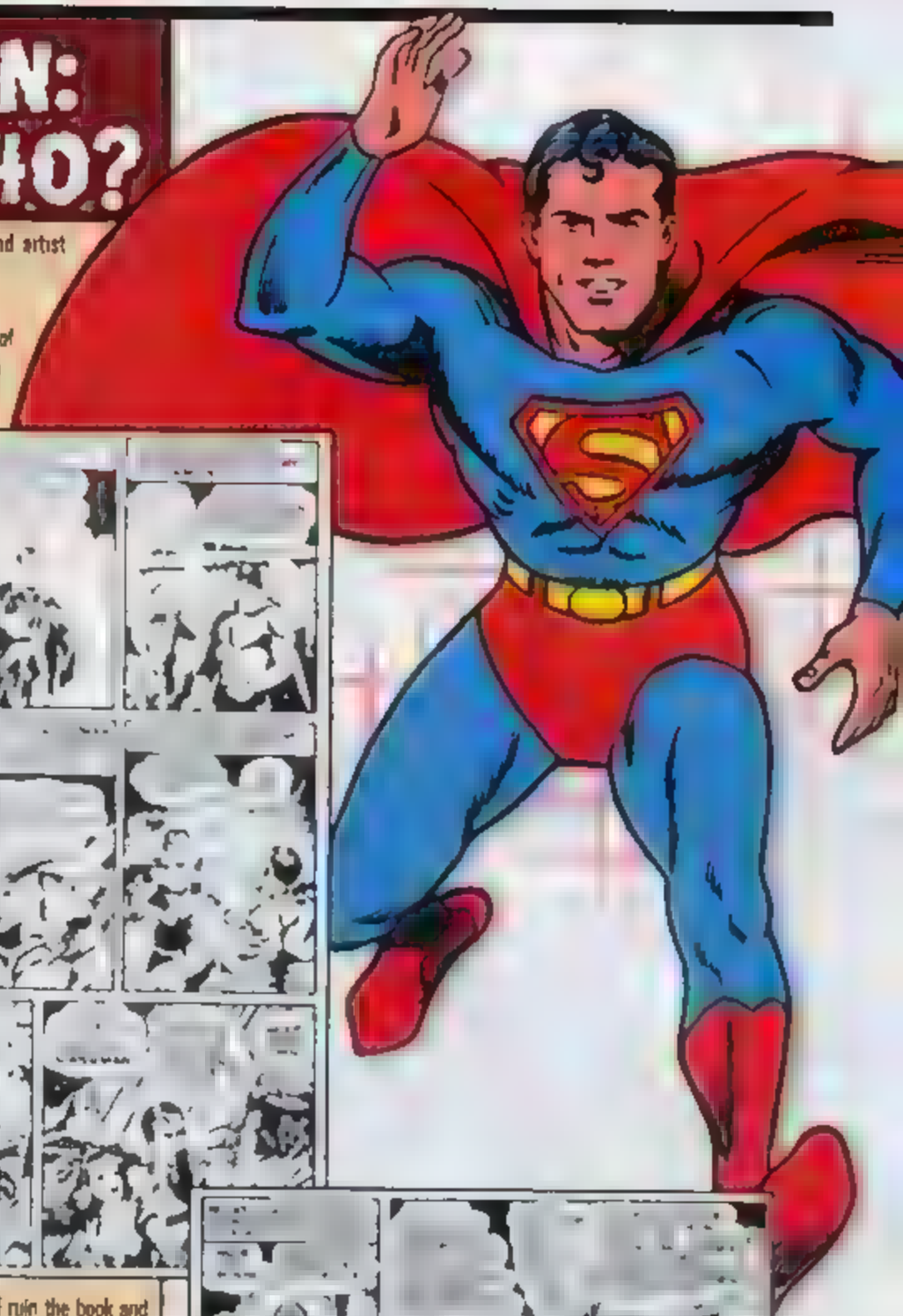
WHY IT NEVER HAPPENED: Soon after Moore pitched DC on the 12-issue maxi-series, the writer had a falling out with the publisher over royalties surrounding the success of *Watchmen* and swore he'd never work for DC Comics again. Over the years, Moore and DC's relationship has not improved, even after WildStorm, which publishes Moore's America's Best Comics line, was acquired by DC Comics.

WILL IT EVER HAPPEN: "I really don't remember much about that project," admits Moore. "And I'm interested in writing different kinds of things than I was when I pitched [*Twilight of the Superheroes*]. I don't have a relationship with DC anymore, nor do I want one. So I don't see myself ever doing it."



TWILIGHT ZONE Since Alan Moore no longer has much of a relationship with DC, *Twilight of the Superheroes* remains in limbo.

1. SUPERMAN: R.I.P. IN 1940?



THE PLAYERS: Superman creators writer Jerry Siegel and artist Joe Shuster

THE PROJECT: *Superman*

THE STORY: If Siegel and Shuster had their way, the legend of Superman would have been radically altered in the 1940s. In a never-published story drawn from a 14-page script, the Man of Steel's creators not only would have introduced Kryptonite a full two years before it shows up on the "Superman" radio show and 10 years before it ever appears in a Superman comic, but also would have ended it with a stunning shocker: Clark Kent revealing to Lois Lane that he is really the Man of Steel! "I still can't believe it," exclaims Lois, as Clark rips off his shirt to reveal the trademark red and yellow S shield of Superman underneath. "You ...Clark Kent... Superman!"

WHY IT WAS NEVER PUBLISHED: At the time, DC Comics (then called National Periodical Publishing) felt that revealing Superman's alter ego to anyone, especially Lois Lane, would ruin the book and destroy the developing love triangle between Lois, Clark Kent and Superman. Kryptonite was also done away possessing for the time being because DC felt it was too powerful a weapon and that anyone with it could easily defeat Superman, as a handful of thugs do in this very tale. In the end, the entire issue was scrapped. Lois would not learn Clark Kent is Superman until *Action Comics* #662 in 1991 and Kryptonite instead makes its first appearance on the Superman radio show in early 1940.

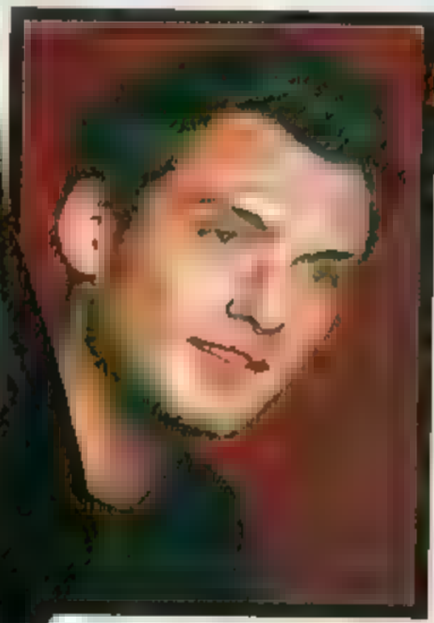
WILL IT EVER HAPPEN: Regrettably, DC says it has no plans to publish this story. Aside from being nearly 60 years out of date, all the events in this story have already occurred in regular Superman continuity. But while DC has no specific plans to collect this story, it's not impossible that it could show up in a hardcover edition at some point, perhaps in something like a *Superman Archives* collection. "I would love to see this story published at some point," gushes *Fantastic Four* writer Mark Waid, who discovered this story in DC's archives while working for the publisher. "It's an important part of Superman's history that's never been seen."

BRIEF BIOS: Superman creators Jerry Siegel and Joe Shuster created the Man of Steel to reveal his secret identity to Lois Lane in 1940.

CASTING call

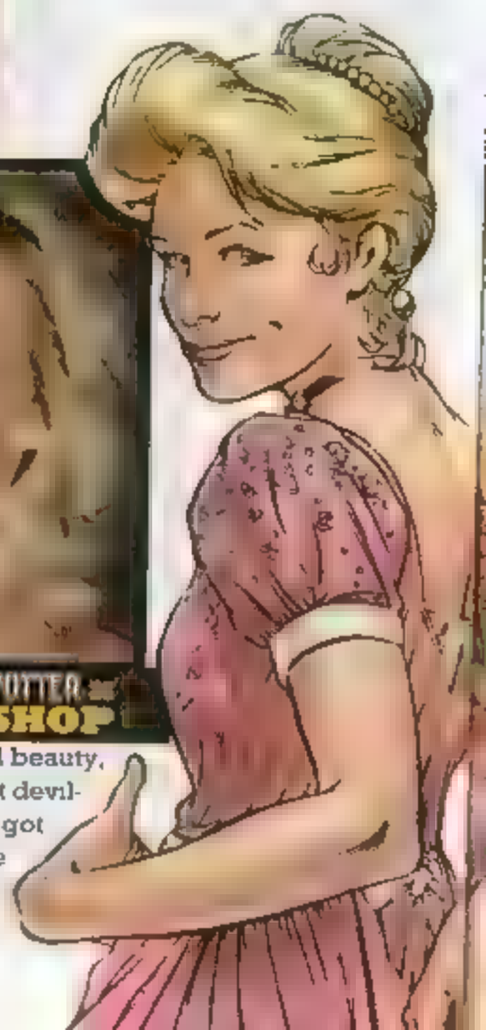
WIZARD casts the RUSE MOVIE!

Looking for a costume adventure with a kick? In CrossGen's *Ruse*, a Sherlock Holmes-like detective and his female assistant quarrel like lovers while embarking on rollicking adventures in a city that bears an uncanny resemblance to Victorian-era England. They battle all manner of foes, from mundane murderers to mystical enchantresses to fiendish criminal masterminds, and chase all over the globe in search of their quarry. If you dig classic adventure films like "Journey to the Center of the Earth," "Around the World in 80 Days" or "The Time Machine," then "Ruse" will be the flick for you!



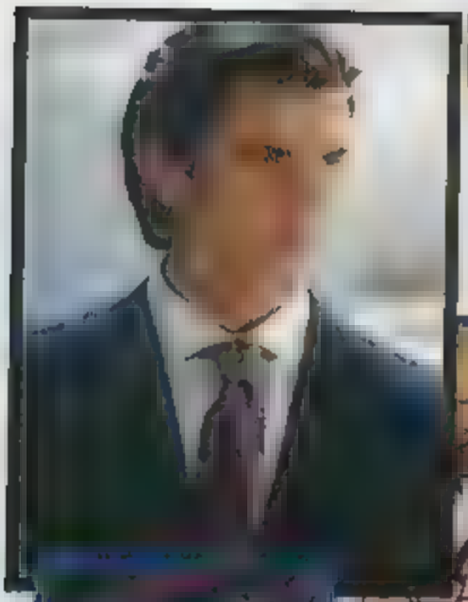
JUDE LAW as
SIMON ARCHARD

Detective Simon Archard, a cold, calculating master detective, possesses a razor-sharp mind,...and a tongue to match. He's often quite reserved, but when the occasion arises, he can be a fiery opponent. We'd cast Law, who's done cold as a robot in "A.I." but has also portrayed a witty, urbane blue blood in "The Talented Mr. Ripley."



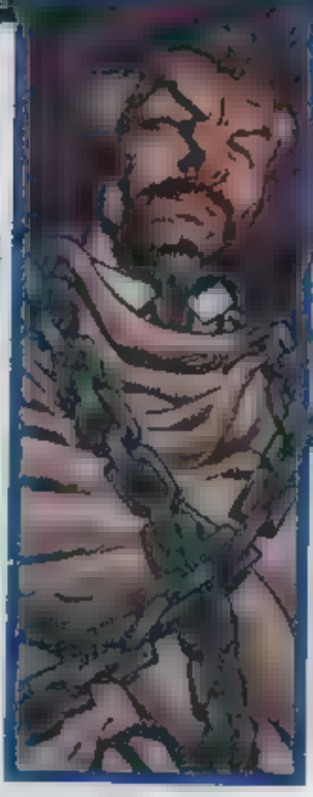
MONICA POTTER as
EMMA BISHOP

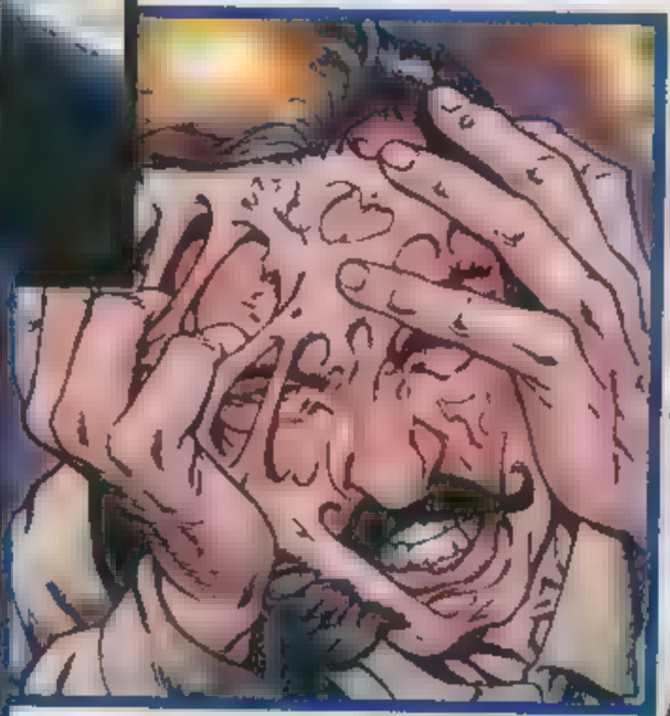
We love Monica Potter's classical beauty, a definite must to play the prim but devil-may-care Bishop. Plus, Potter's got the chops (as seen in "Along Came a Spider") to pull off Emma's toughness, capability and power



CHRISTIAN BALE as
MALCOLM LIGHTBOURNE

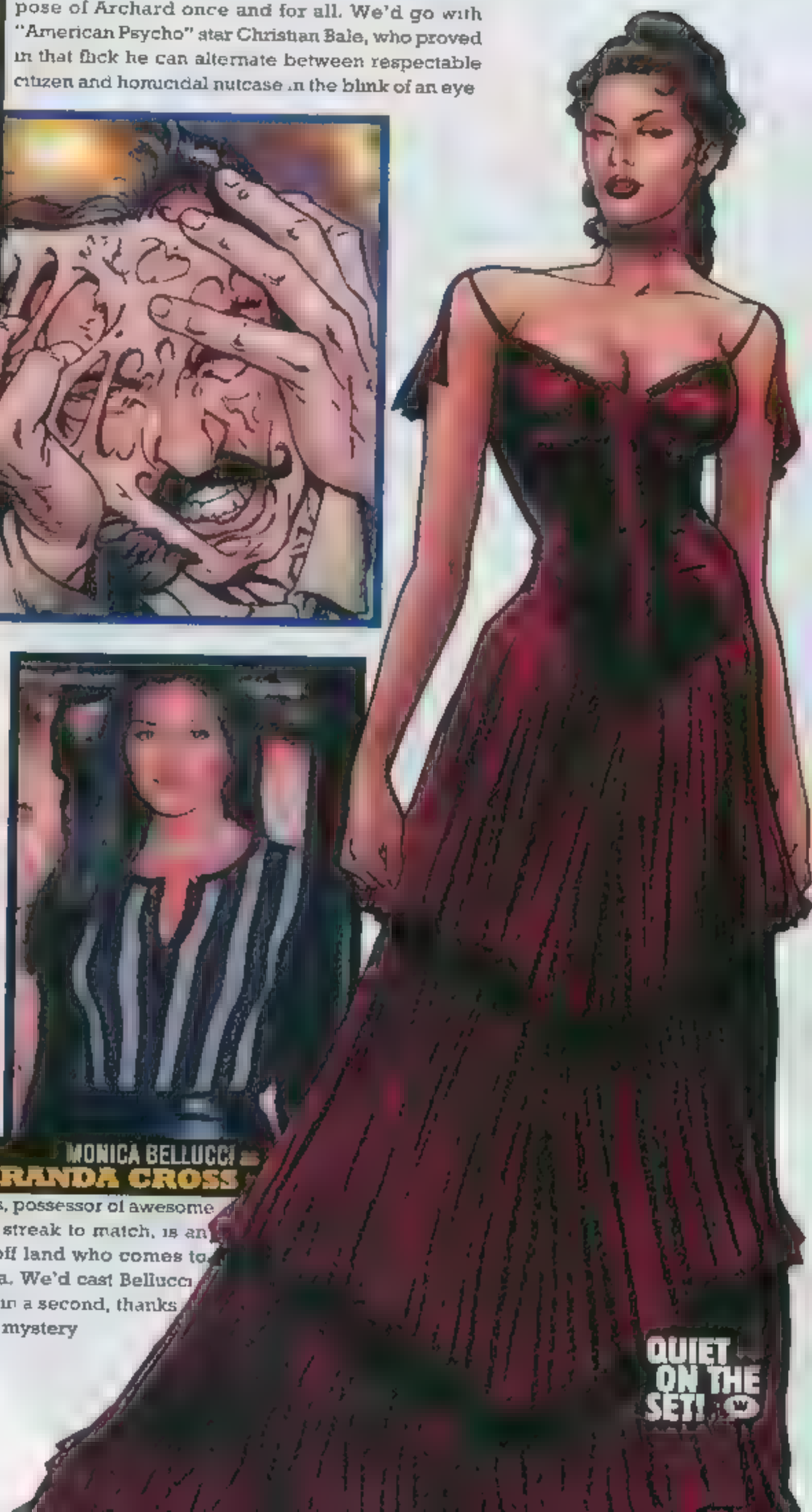
Lightbourne is Archard's former assistant turned mortal enemy, a man who'll stop at nothing to dispose of Archard once and for all. We'd go with "American Psycho" star Christian Bale, who proved in that flick he can alternate between respectable citizen and homicidal nutcase in the blink of an eye





MONICA BELLUCCI as
MIRANDA CROSS

The enigmatic Miranda Cross, possessor of awesome mystical power and an evil streak to match, is an exotic traveler from a far-off land who comes to antagonize Simon and Emma. We'd cast Bellucci ("Brotherhood of the Wolf") in a second, thanks to her overpowering aura of mystery



QUIET ON THE SET!

MUTANT MAKEOVER

Get a preview of the new looks in Season 3 of 'X-Men: Evolution'

This fall, get ready for the "Evolution" revolution.

After two successful seasons on The Kids' WB!, "X-Men: Evolution" is going through some changes, according to Marvel Studios' Executive of Creative Affairs Craig Kyle, who oversees the show's progress and even earned some writing credits this season.

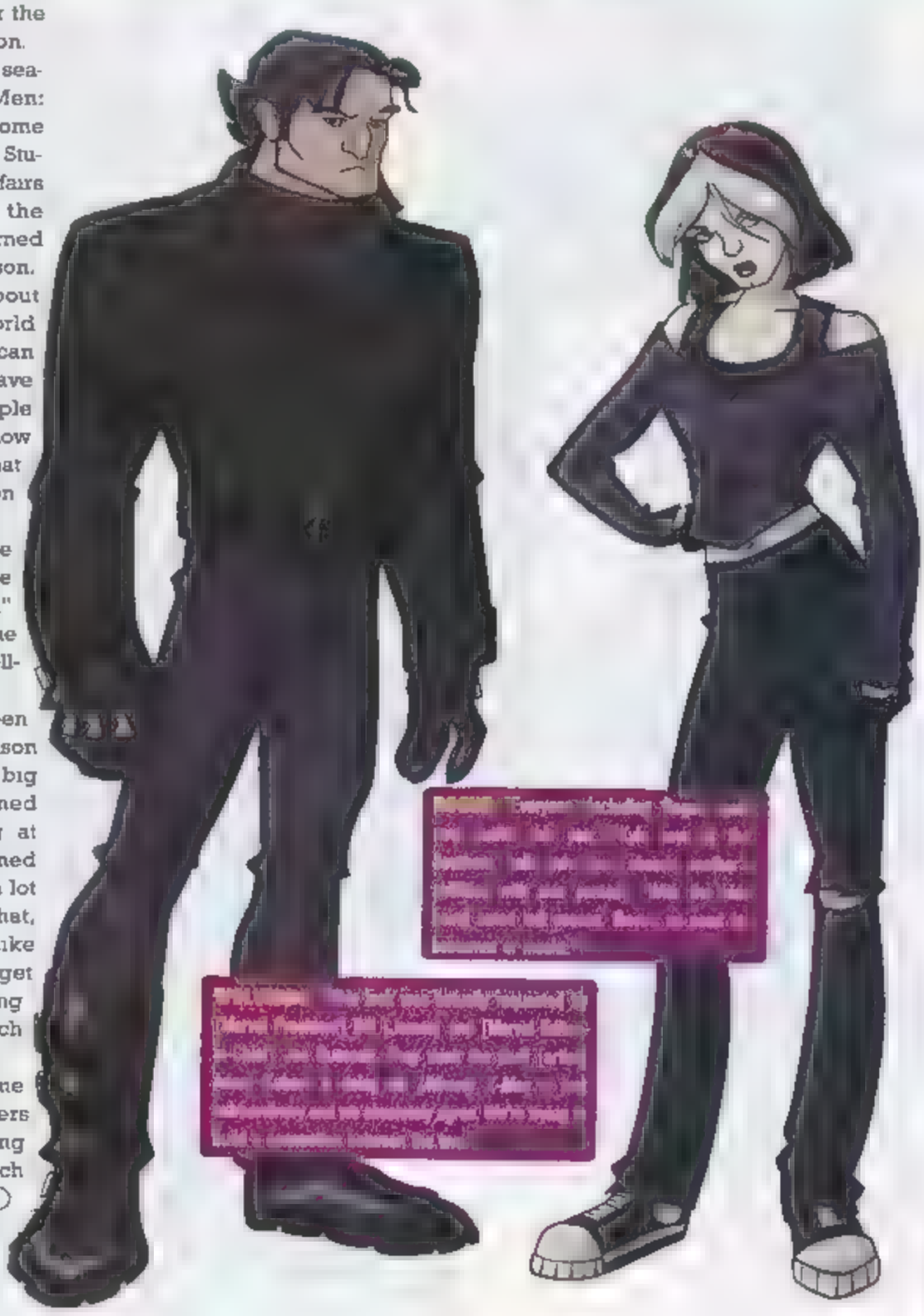
"Season Three's all about coming to terms with the world knowing what these kids can do," revealed Kyle. "They have to live among normal people who fear and hate them, but now that the world found out what these kids can do [in Season Two] they won't hide."

According to Kyle, while dealing with being outed is one concern for the "Evolution" cast, there will also be some new faces and one very well-known bad guy showing up.

"Apocalypse has been seen before, and by the time Season Three is done he will be a big part of our series," explained Kyle. "We'll be introducing at least one new character, named X-23, who you'll be hearing a lot about I'm sure." Besides that, some of your favorites, like Storm, Rogue and the Beast, get all new looks for the upcoming season, the premier for which has yet to be determined.

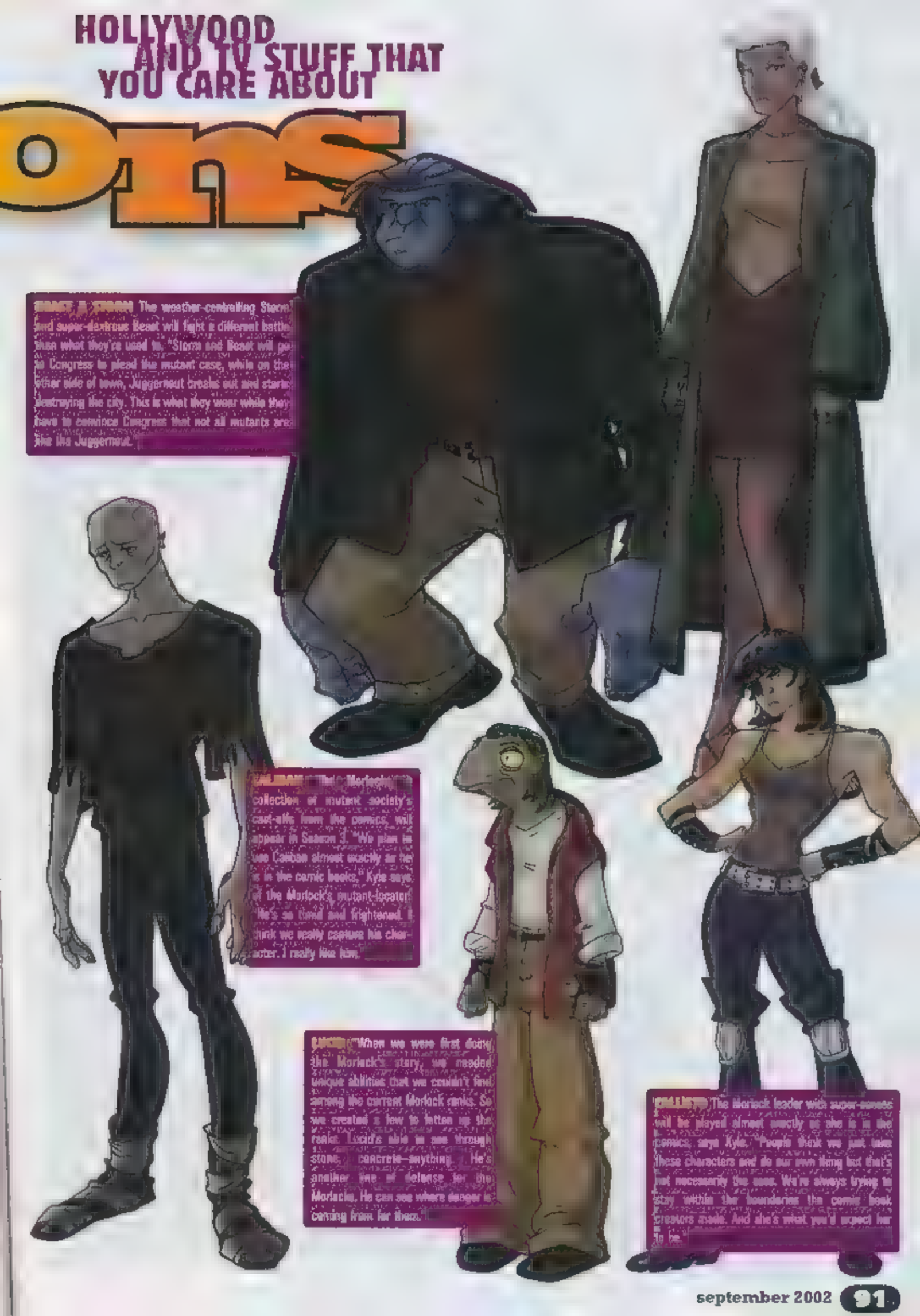
Here's an early look at some new and redesigned characters for "X-Men: Evolution," along with Kyle's comments on each.

■ MIKE COTTON



HOLLYWOOD AND TV STUFF THAT YOU CARE ABOUT

ONS



CHANCE A STORM The weather-controlling Storm and super-dextrous Beast will fight a different battle than what they're used to. "Storm and Beast will go to Congress to plead the mutant case, while on the other side of town, Juggernaut breaks out and starts destroying the city. This is what they wear while they have to convince Congress that not all mutants are like the Juggernaut."

CALIBAN The Morlocks, a collection of mutant society's cast-offs from the comics, will appear in Season 3. "We plan to use Caliban almost exactly as he is in the comic books," Kyle says of the Morlock's mutant-locator. "He's so timid and frightened. I think we really capture his character. I really like him."

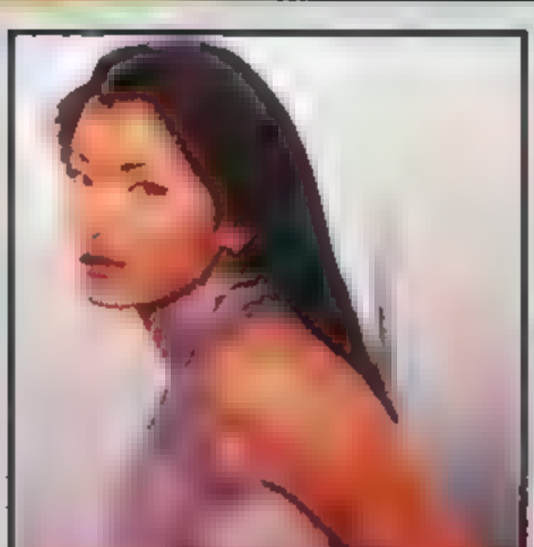
SAMPLE "When we were first doing the Morlock's story, we needed unique abilities that we couldn't find among the current Morlock ranks. So we created a few to fatten up the ranks. Lucid's able to see through stone, concrete—anything. He's another line of defense for the Morlocks. He can see where danger is coming from for them."

CALLISTO The Morlock leader with super-senses will be played almost exactly as she is in the comics, says Kyle. "People think we just take these characters and do our own thing but that's not necessarily the case. We're always trying to stay within the boundaries the comic book creators made. And she's what you'd expect her to be."

TRAILERS...

X-ANNOUNCEMENTS 20th Century Fox recently released the official description of the plot for "X-Men 2": "The X-Men reunite again as Magneto breaks from jail, and Henry Gyrich is revealed to be alive working with Military Officer Agent Stryker to build Sentinels. The X-Men also recruit two new team members, Gambit and Nightcrawler."

And in other X-news & rumors, Katie Stuart ("The Crow: Stairway to Heaven") has been hired to portray the intangible mutant Kitty Pryde in the sequel, even though Sumela Kay played the part in the original. A couple of casting rumors have also been cleared up: Brian Cox ("The Bourne Identity") will NOT by playing Stryker, as originally reported in the *Victoria Times*, and the part that Kelly Hu ("Scorpion King") will be tacking is neither Lady Deathstrike nor Yuriko Oyama. Instead, Hu will be playing Anne Reynolds, an assistant to the mutant-hunting Stryker.



SONY WEBS UP KOEPP Sony Entertainment has tapped screenwriter David Koepp to pen the script for "Spider-Man 2," even though Koepp had originally said he would not write a sequel to the $406-million blockbuster. Sony had announced back in April that "Smallville" producers Alfred Gough and Miles Millar would be handling screenplay chores for the sequel, but now, the studio plans on going with a first draft from Koepp which will then be tweaked by Gough and Millar. Thanks to the overwhelming success of "Spider-Man," Sony has fast tracked the follow-up, with plans to begin shooting in January 2003 for a May 2004 release.

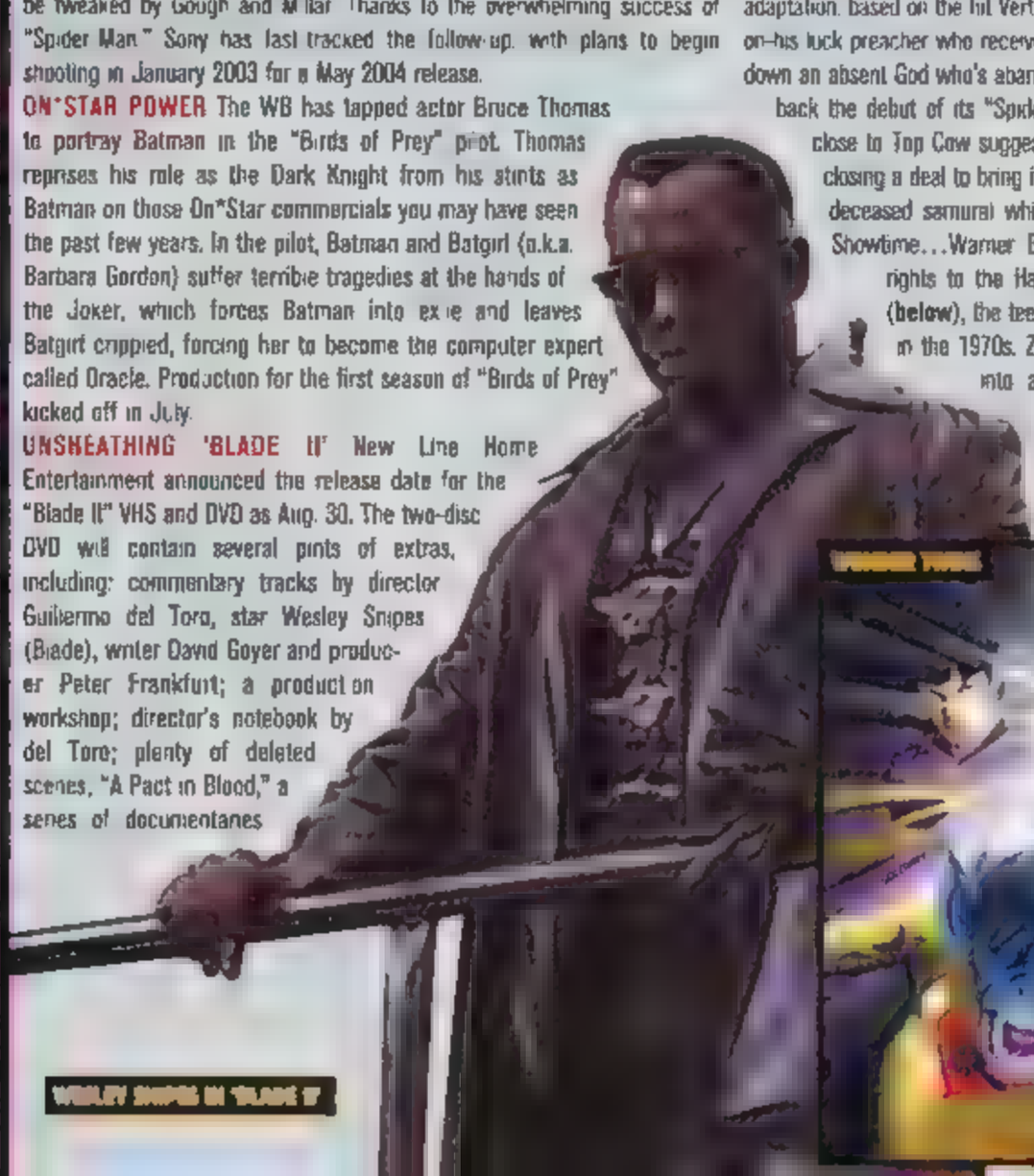
ON*STAR POWER The WB has tapped actor Bruce Thomas to portray Batman in the "Birds of Prey" pilot. Thomas reprises his role as the Dark Knight from his stints as Batman on those On*Star commercials you may have seen the past few years. In the pilot, Batman and Batgirl (a.k.a. Barbara Gordon) suffer terrible tragedies at the hands of the Joker, which forces Batman into exile and leaves Batgirl crippled, forcing her to become the computer expert called Oracle. Production for the first season of "Birds of Prey" kicked off in July.

UNSHEATHING 'BLADE II' New Line Home Entertainment announced the release date for the "Blade II" VHS and DVD as Aug. 30. The two-disc DVD will contain several pints of extras, including: commentary tracks by director Guillermo del Toro, star Wesley Snipes (Blade), writer David Goyer and producer Peter Frankfurt; a production workshop; director's notebook by del Toro; plenty of deleted scenes, "A Pact in Blood," a series of documentaries on the film; a "Blade II" video game survival guide; and music videos by Cypress Hill and Roni Size.

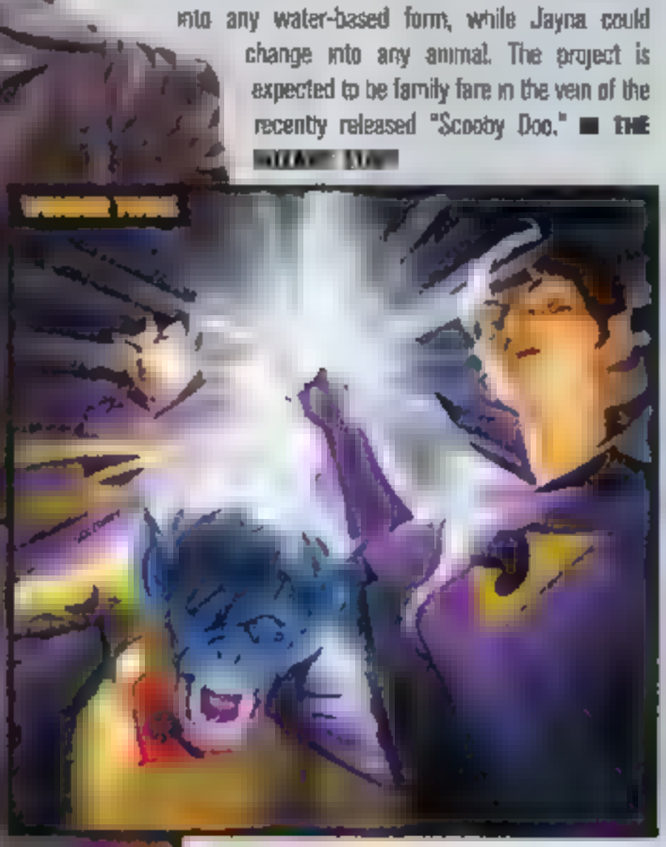
THE DEATH OF SUPERMAN Miramax has plans in the works to produce a feature film based on the life and tragic death of former Superman actor George Reeves, titled "Truth, Justice and the American Way." Reeves played the Man of Steel on TV in the 1950s, but when he died under mysterious circumstances–some say his death was a suicide, others theorize it was foul play–it caused quite a scandal in Hollywood. The film is set to be produced by the team of Michael and Mark Polish.

WILSON ADDS BITE TO 'GENTLEMEN' In "League of Extraordinary Gentlemen" news, actress Peta Wilson (TV's "La Femme Nikita") has replaced Monica Bellucci in the role of Mina Harker. Bellucci, who starred in "Brotherhood of the Wolf," dropped out of negotiations because of a scheduling conflict. Wilson will now take on the role of Harker, a beautiful and fiery British scientist who once had a nasty encounter with Dracula. She and the other Gentlemen must team up to stop an evil madman threatening London at the dawn of the 20th century.

SHORT TAKES It's been confirmed that James Marsden (Cyclops in "X-Men") is in serious talks to play lead character Jesse Custer in a feature "Preacher" adaptation, based on the hit Vertigo series from DC Comics. Custer is a down-on-his luck preacher who receives omnipotent power which he uses to track down an absent God who's abandoned Heaven....MTV has reportedly pushed back the debut of its "Spider-Man" cartoon until early 2003. Sources close to Top Cow suggest that the publisher is in the final stages to closing a deal to bring its *No Honor* mini-series, about the ghost of a deceased samurai which gets resurrected in the present day, to Showtime....Warner Bros. and Gaylord Films have optioned the rights to the Hanna-Barbera characters The Wonder Twins (**below**), the teen sidekicks who appeared on "SuperFriends" in the 1970s. Zan was the male twin who could transform into any water-based form, while Jayna could change into any animal. The project is expected to be family fare in the vein of the recently released "Scooby Doo." ■ THE



WESLEY SNIPES IN "BLADE II"



BEST BATMAN GAME EVER?

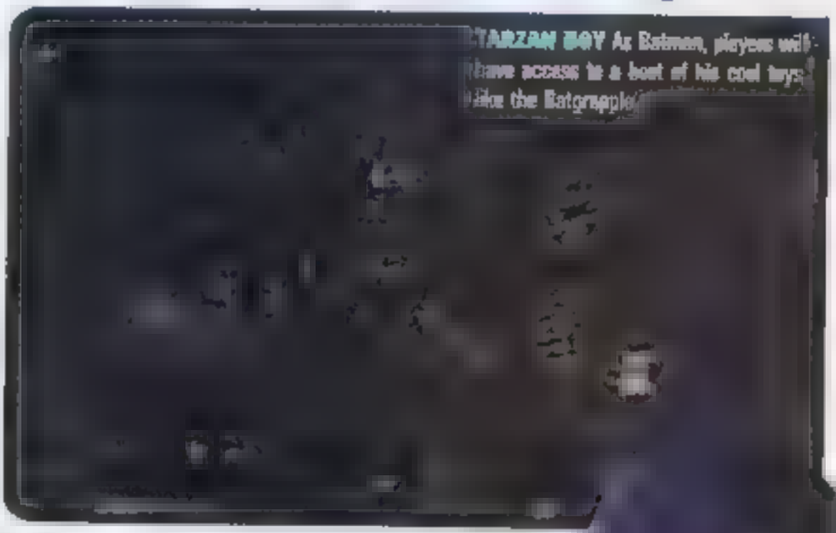
Jump inside the Dark Knight's head in new Kemco video game

Think it's cool to drive the Batmobile? Kemco takes it one step further this November as you can actually hop into the Dark Knight's brain.

Kemco's *Batman: Dark Tomorrow* gives gamers all the Bat-action they can handle when it puts the Caped Crusader through the ringer in what promises to be the darkest and most challenging Bat-game to date. Scheduled for release on the GAMECUBE, PS2 and Xbox, Kemco's first Bat-title is a third-person, single-player adventure that plunks players into the boots of the Caped Crusader as he races to save Gotham City from fiendish rogues like the Joker, Mr. Freeze and Poison Ivy.

Hardcore fans will rejoice to hear *Dark Tomorrow* will follow the comic version of Batman. In the game, the Dark Knight Detective hunts for the missing Commissioner Gordon. With Gordon out of the picture, gangsters Black Mask and Scarface go toe-to-toe to see who will take charge of Gotham. To further complicate things, Arkham Asylum lies in complete chaos. With Gotham going to hell in a handbasket, Batman must stop the gang war, settle down those loonies in Arkham and somehow locate the Commish!

"It's no picnic," describes *Batman: Gotham Adventures* comic book writer Scott Peterson, who co-wrote *Dark Tomorrow* with Kenji Terada (*Final Fantasy I, II, III*). "He's gotta fight Scarface and Black Mask and their respective gangs as well as go up against Killer Croc, Poison Ivy, Mr. Freeze and Mr. Zsasz. And of course, there's the Joker—and all that's the easy part." Thankfully, Bats will get a little help from allies Batgirl, Oracle and Robin.

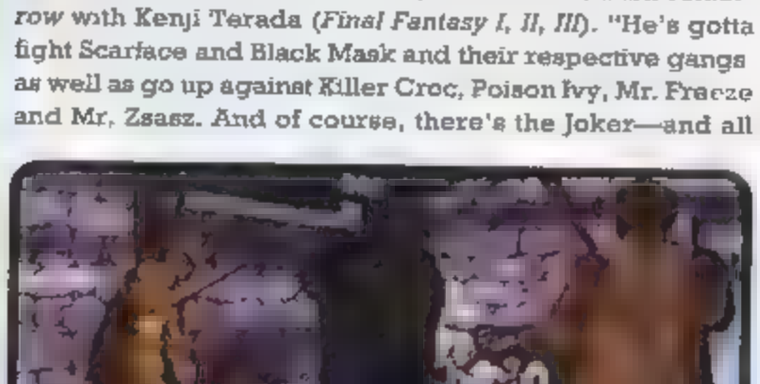


TARZAN BOY As Batman, players will have access to a host of his cool toys, like the Batgrapple.

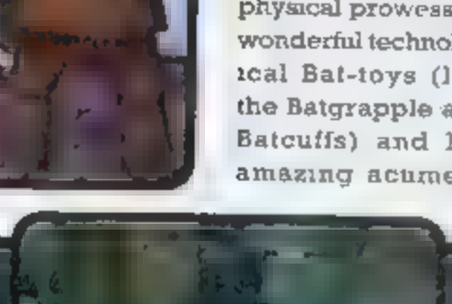
But don't expect Batman to simply punch his way through his latest digital adventure.

"I'm tired of games that just kick and punch," explains Takafumi Yuki, who's the producer of *Dark Tomorrow*. "I'm concentrating on implementing detective elements, such as chasing [a bad guy or] sneaking around while hiding from opponents. I want players to *experience* Batman."

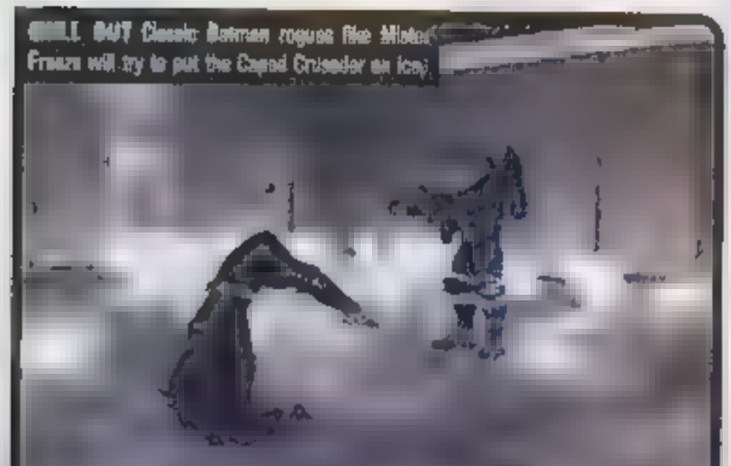
Indeed they will. Gamers will be able to tap almost every skill the Dark Knight is known for, including his physical prowess, his wonderful technological Bat-toys (like the Batgrapple and Batcuffs) and his amazing acumen.



LOONEY TOONS A part of the storyline has Batman trapped in Arkham Asylum.



DC's resident king of the sea has resurfaced (sorry, couldn't resist). Here's a sampling of the latest screenshots from TDK's upcoming Aquaman title. The video adventure has the King of Atlantis squaring off with baddies like Ocean Master and Black Manta and is scheduled to make a splash on both GAMECUBE and Xbox this fall.



SKILL SHOT Classic Batman rogues like Mister Freeze will try to put the Caped Crusader on ice.

Batman can even use his cape to fend off feisty attackers.

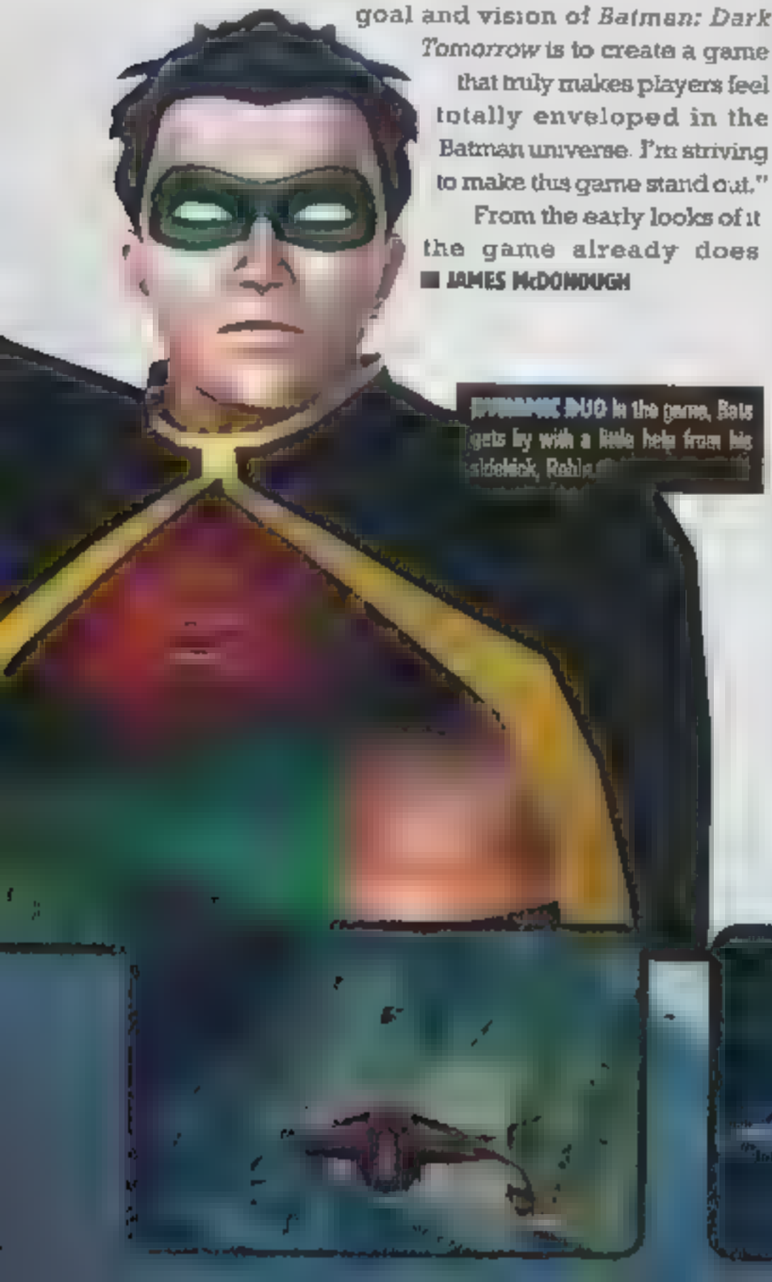
"These days, you can pretty much do anything in the gaming medium," comments Peterson, marveling at the latest developments in video game technology. "This means we could show Batman the way we wanted to. So we've got a character who's as smart as Sherlock Holmes AND could take out Bruce Lee without breaking a sweat."

And while some would be daunted by working on an icon of Batman's caliber, Yuki refuses to back down from his dream of transporting players into the Dark Knight's grim world.

"I do feel the pressure of becoming a part of Batman's 60-plus years of history," he admits. "My goal and vision of *Batman: Dark Tomorrow* is to create a game that truly makes players feel totally enveloped in the Batman universe. I'm striving to make this game stand out."

From the early looks of it, the game already does.

■ JAMES McDONOUGH



DYNAMIC DUO In the game, Bats gets by with a little help from his sidekick, Robin.

rumblings

DREAMCASTING Rumor has it that Dreamwave Productions is on the fast track to produce comic books based on a major franchise for one of the biggest players in the console industry.

SUPER SWAG Nak. is uniting comic and video game fans with their line of Marvel-inspired peripherals. Look for memory cards, arcade sticks and GBA faceplates brandishing the marvelous mugs of Ultimate Spider-Man, the Ultimate X-Men and the Incredible Hulk, the coolest of which has to be the 2-in-1 X-Men PS2 multi-tap with DVD remote (right).

SOUL LINK Namco has borrowed Nintendo's Link, hero of *The Legend of Zelda*, to guest star in the GAMECUBE version of *Soul Calibur 2*. And with the recent announcement that Namco is developing a true sequel to the *Star Fox* games (3-D space battle), the Tri-Force arcade board (co-developed by Nintendo, Namco and Sega—and named after the famous artifact from the Zelda games) is bearing some really cool fruit so far! Sega, as well, is making two F-Zero games!

GREEN DAY To tie into the June 2003 release of the Hulk movie, Universal Interactive plans to release *The Hulk*, a single-player action-adventure game for the PS2, Xbox, GAMECUBE and Game Boy Advance. While the pixelized Hulk will be based on director Ang Lee's film version, the story will differ to accommodate the game's faster pace.

GREYSKULL GAME He-Man and the Masters of the Universe are not only getting a new toy line and Cartoon Network TV series, but will also appear on game systems everywhere! (Anyone remember *The Power of He-Man* game for the Intellivision?) By TDK, expect its release in stores this November.

■ [illegible]

manga MANIA!

COOL JAPANESE COMIC AND ANIMATION NEWS YOU NEED TO KNOW...

PRIME TIME INVADERS

Optimus Prime and Transformers roll out in Cartoon Network's new series

Your favorite heavy metal heroes have returned to television! No, not Ozzy Osbourne—we're talking about everyone's favorite robots in disguise, the Transformers!

With '80s mania now at a fever pitch, Cartoon Network is set to roll out "Transformers Armada," an all-new, classically animated series with a definite nod to the distinct stylings of anime.

"Armada" follows reimagined versions of the Transformers, a race of giant, sentient robots that can transform into vehicles, jets, weapons and other machines. The benevolent Optimus Prime, leader of the Autobots, once again leads the charge to foil the latest nefarious plans of the diabolical Megatron and his evil crew of Decepticon cronies.

Apparently, millions of years ago, a subrace known as Mini-Cons fled the Transformer homeworld of Cybertron after growing tired of being Megatron's unwilling guinea pigs. Crash-landing on Earth, the Mini-Cons, who have the power to enhance the abilities of larger Transformers, became dormant and remained that way until three young children named Alexa, Carlos and Rad accidentally awaken them in the present day. This reactivation alerts Megatron, who immediately departs for Earth with his gang to reacquire them, hoping to tip the scales in their favor in the ongoing war between the Decepticons and the Autobots. Fortunately Optimus Prime catches wind of Megatron's latest scheme, so he and his posse of Autobots follow in pursuit.

Cartoon Network is confident this latest installment in the Transformers mythos will offer something to both hardcore Transfans and new viewers. "'Transformers' has been a fan favorite for a number of years," explained Sam Register, a development executive for Cartoon Network. "With this new series, the battle between the Autobots and the Decepticons goes to an entirely new level. We think Cartoon Network fans will really enjoy the new direction of 'Transformers Armada.'"

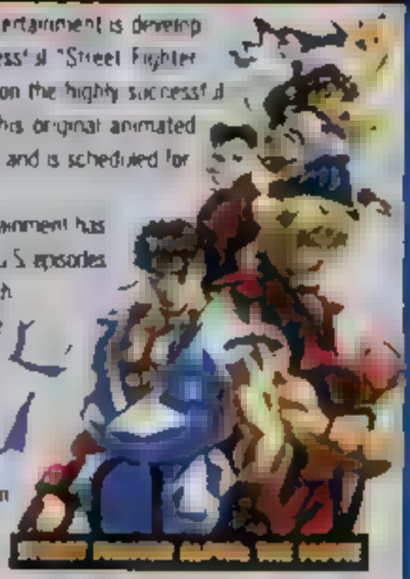
But the Armada convoy doesn't stop rolling there. Mimicking the marketing of the previous Transformers explosion in the '80s, fans can pick up Dreamwave's *Armada* comic series adaptation and should keep their eyes peeled for Hasbro's new fall line of Armada toys.

As for the show, the first episode of 'Armada' kicks off on August 30, airing on Fridays at 6:30 p.m. ET during Cartoon Network's Toonami block. In November the initial run of 52 episodes will join the daily Toonami rotation. Transform and roll out! ■ JAMES McDONOUGH

manga MANIA!

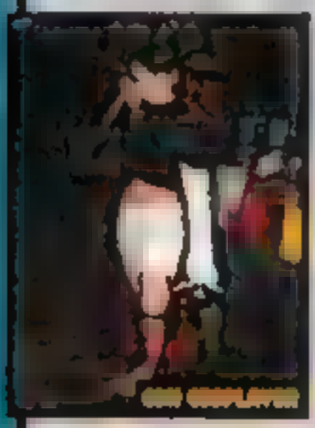
ANIME BUZZBOX!

ROUND TWO FIGHT! Manga Entertainment is developing a sequel to last year's successful "Street Fighter Alpha: The Movie" anime. Based on the highly successful Capcom video game franchise, this original animated feature has entered preproduction and is scheduled for a late 2003 release.



BATTLE PLANS Sandy Frank Entertainment has landed 20 never-before-seen-in-the-U.S. episodes of "Gatchaman," the anime on which "Battle of the Planets" is based. The company is considering altering these episodes "for a more contemporary audience with added Japanese footage, enhanced special effects and new dialogue from the original voice actors."

CON FEVER If you're in New York City this Labor Day Weekend (Aug. 30-Sept. 2), be sure to attend the 2nd annual Big Apple Anime Fest (**www.bigappleanimefest.com**), which is partnering with Anime Expo New York (**www.anny.org**) to put on one of the largest anime and manga conventions in the country. The celebration will include events like film screenings, awards ceremonies, academic symposiums, vendor rooms, autograph sessions and a Cosplay exhibition in and around New York's famed Times Square. Be there!



KUNG FU FIGHTING ComicsOne (**www.comicsone.com**) has formed a "Kung Fu Comics" imprint to group together its five martial arts-inspired titles imported from Hong Kong. According to Marketing Manager Nicole Curry, the acquisition of Tony Wong's *Weapons of the Gods*, *The Legendary Couple* and *Mega Dragon and Tiger*, *Future Kung Fu Action* will join Wang Shing Ma's legendary *Storm Riders* and *Heaven Sword and Dragon Sabre* in their new line. "Each book adds diversity to the line," Curry commented; "While there's a lot of martial-arts action in each book, some are futuristic, some are political and some are even romantic." Curry added: "Chinese kung fu comics are usually set in a world full of superhumanly powerful kung fu practitioners. These stories focus on their lives, the intricacies of their numerous different kung fu styles and the ramifications of traveling down the kung fu path. All of our titles will deal with these themes." For Ma, partnering with ComicsOne is just the beginning. "I want to share my comic books with the world," he said. "ComicsOne is my first step to enter the North American arena. I want people to enjoy my unique stories, beautiful artwork and educate others about Chinese culture."

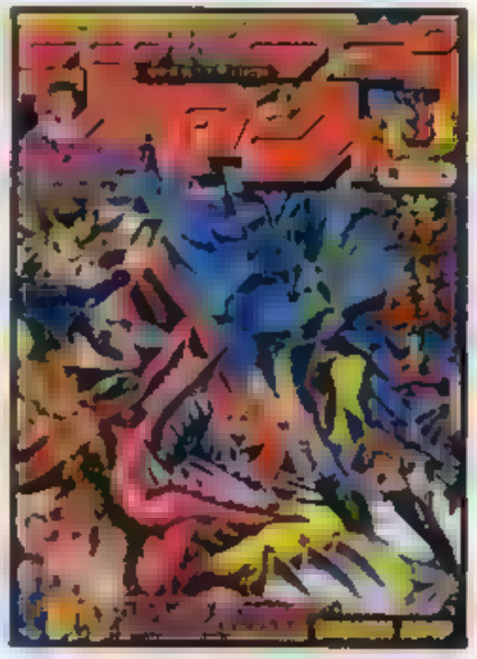
■ THE WIZARD STAFF

'JUMP' RIGHT IN

Viz brings hot anthology stateside

What do you do with a Japanese comic that sells over three million copies a week? Get it over here as fast as you can.

That's exactly what Viz Communications plans on doing this November. The San Francisco-based publisher best known for such popular manga titles as *Dragon Ball Z* and *Pokemon* is partnering with Japan's Shueisha Inc. to launch an all-new monthly manga anthology series. The title will be closely patterned after Shueisha's insanely successful *Shonen Jump* which sells over three million copies a week in Japan and has introduced manga versions of anime icons like Yu-Gi-Oh!



"The magazine will serve to define, reflect and reinforce the (anime) lifestyle," explained Viz founder and president Seiji Horibuchi. "We plan on putting our hearts, souls and a multi-million dollar budget into making this magazine successful."

Offered at $4.95, Viz is projecting first year sales to reach 100,000 a month with an estimated goal of one million within three years. ■ JMD

'TRAIL' BLAZER

Marvel serves up original manga

This month, Marvel breaks new ground by introducing its first anime-inspired original story, and in an innovative format to boot!

Eden's Trail is a six-issue mini-series written and drawn by Steve Uy, who's thus far best known for his cover work on the recent *Iceman* mini-series. Taking place in the fantasy world of Trilands, *Eden's Trail* follows an immortal hero named Laich who's on a mysterious quest that will eventually lead him to the mystical Seipher's cave.

The book is presented in Marvel Scope format, where all the pages are arranged horizontally, and Uy couldn't be happier.

"Doing this in the wide screen format allows me to do images in the most cinematic way possible," explains the 23-year-old creator. "I believe this is the first Marvel Scope book that actually tries to re-create the cinematic experience rather than just using it to show more artsy compositions." ■ JMD

BOOK of the MONTH!

THE INCREDIBLE HULK

ON THE RUN 'FUGITIVE'-STYLE, BRUCE BANNER GRAPPLES WITH THE BAD THINGS THAT HAPPEN WHEN THE HULK SHOWS UP

Since meeting Bruce Jones, Bruce Banner's found he has bigger problems than the one-ton green monster inside him.

Playing down the Hulk's importance in a title that bears his name sounds like a good way to send long-time *Hulk* fans into fits of rage. But when writer Jones put the Hulk's alter ego in the spotlight beginning with his first issue (last November's *Incredible Hulk* #34), readers finally saw it's the man, not the monster, that makes the book tick.

"[*Hulk* editor Axel Alonso and I] wanted the feel of our series to be more steeped in realism, and we knew that if Hulk was really doing all this damage across the nation, his counterpart must be paying for it, both emotionally as well as legally, explains Jones. "The Hulk' television series and 'The Fugitive' were mentioned as an approach. We didn't set out to consciously ape them; it was just Axel's way of giving me a point of reference."

The new formula has worked. Already, *Hulk*'s rampaged its way up 35 spots in Diamond's Top 100 Comics ranking. Most of the title's success can be attributed to Jones' conspiracy-ridden tales, which have plunged Banner into the set-up of a young boy's murder (issue #34), being stalked by two stealthy assassins (#38) and a run-in with a faux-FBI agent intent on harvesting the Hulk's DNA for an army of Hulk-like soldiers (#42).

A healthy dose of intrigue exists in the form of the mysterious Mr. Blue. A crucial, unseen sidekick of sorts, Blue feeds Banner valuable information via short, secretive Internet messages, guiding him across the country and assisting him in evading danger. But danger proves unavoidable as Banner must flee locale after locale, driving the story and making *The Incredible Hulk* one of the most suspenseful reads on comic shop shelves today.

Thanks to the dynamic art of John Romita Jr. (*Amazing Spider-Man*) on Jones' first storyarc and Lee Weeks (*Tarzan/Batman*) on his second, suspense and pulse-quickening action pack a one-two punch. Whenever the Hulk surfaces in his own series, it's an event in itself; the Hulk's presence now makes a bad situation worse. For Jones, sporadic transformations provide the most effective way to involve the green goliath himself.

"Pinning down the Hulk's psyche is akin to nailing Jell-O to a tree," compares Jones, "so we attempt to get into the brute through his milder half, Banner. Or at least what *seems* the milder half." At the end of issue #34, Banner proves that he and his brutish half are not so diametrically opposed. As a street gang threatens Banner with an "ass-whippin'," he responds with a faint hint of a smile, saying, "Better make it *quick*." A page later, an unseen Hulk has pummeled the thugs, leaving them battered and wrapped in an alleyway's metal gutters!

With brief-yet-terrifying appearances by the Hulk and the mounting tension of a Grade-A thriller, Jones' run on the series is poised to become the most definitive run on *The Incredible Hulk* since writer

HITCHIN' A RIDE With adversaries and rogue government agents in hot pursuit, Bruce Banner buns rides across the country while keeping the Hulk in check.

Peter David redefined the character during the late '80s and '90s.

But Banner pays the price for the title's success. Constantly on the run while keeping the Hulk locked away inside him, the good doctor's transformed into one of the most no-nonsense characters in comics. In issues #40 and #41, Banner must diffuse a deadly situation as a hapless, recently terminated exec terrorizes a convenience store with a shotgun. Of course, Banner's "FBI" nemeses arrive to complicate matters, forcing him to choose allies wherever he can in order to escape.

"Banner is a good foil for my style," observes Jones. "He's essentially a character whose roots lie in the real world, and whose angst reflects that world. My feeling is that even before the Hulk came into his life, Banner was a pretty convoluted guy—a mildly agoraphobic loner with a penchant toward paranoia.

"Take a personality already rife with neurosis," continues Jones, "fold in a highly volatile id monster capable of—shall we say embarrassing moments of manifestation—season with an underlying conspiracy both above ground and below, and what writer could resist?"

Since resistance is futile, Jones still has quite a joy(less)ride planned for Banner. With a child's death still hanging over his head (inadvertently caused by the Hulk—or was it?), Banner's learned that the boy is the son of his one-time ally, Doc Samson—even if Samson doesn't know it yet.

"Doc Samson and [Hulk-hunting assassin] Sandra Verdugo were soldiers of fortune together as well as past lovers, and this relationship produced the child that became Ricky Myers," reveals Jones. "Samson has a stake in anything Sandra does if only from an emotional standpoint, even if he isn't aware the child is his. Whether he does or not we haven't revealed yet."

One thing has been made clear in *The Incredible Hulk*: Bruce Banner's tired of playing second banana to a lumbering green monster. He's the star of the show and doesn't plan to relinquish the spotlight anytime soon, no matter who or what the Hulk threatens to smash. ■ MIKE COTTON

bookmarks

BLUE'S CLUES

Like most lonely, tired and mistreated geeks, when Bruce Banner needs a friend, he turns to the Internet.

But instant messages aren't just helping Banner get his ya-yas out—they're keeping him alive. Since writer Bruce Jones took over *Incredible Hulk* with issue #34 last year, Banner's been communicating with the mysterious Mr. Blue, an Internet pen pal who's remained one step ahead of those pursuing Banner, warning him of imminent danger.

"Mr. Blue plays a very important part in the issues to follow immediately," hints Jones. "His identity may in fact be that of someone the reader has already been exposed to. So, though I do believe the revelation will be a shock, it may not be a total surprise."

While Jones won't submit the slightest detail as to Mr. Blue's identity, *Wizard's* narrowed down the suspects.

RICK JONES—The Hulk's former partner could be a strong candidate, but now that he's re-bonded with the cosmically powerful Captain Marvel, he could offer more aid in person than via instant messages. **ODDS: 50-1**

DOC SAMSON—A longtime friend of Bruce Banner, the green-haired, gamma-irradiated physicist's been known to help his unstable scientist buddy out of a jam now and again. A somber Samson recently played a major role, to boot. **ODDS: 40-1**

CAPTAIN AMERICA—The Sentinel of Liberty has always sympathized with Bruce Banner and tried to help him cure himself of the beast inside. Maybe Cap's using some of his government resources to keep Banner one step ahead of those tracking him. And hey, he wears a blue costume! **ODDS: 20-1**

RICKY MYERS—The young boy who the Hulk supposedly killed might still be alive, and his best chance at a normal life might be if Bruce Banner could unravel why Myers has been marked for death. Plus, kids love the Internet. **ODDS: 15-1**

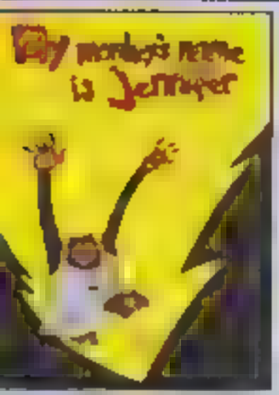
'THUNDERBOLT' ROSS—Sure, Gen. Thunderbolt Ross blames Banner for the death of his daughter and hates the Hulk. So why would he help Banner escape capture? Because Ross himself wants to make Banner suffer! **ODDS: 10-1**

EDDIE BUNKER—Bunker played Mr. Blue in Quentin Tarantino's 1992 cult hit, "Reservoir Dogs." Who's to say he wouldn't reprise his role as Mr. Blue for a comic book gig? Heck, it might even lead to a "Hulk" movie cameo! **ODDS: 100-1** ■ MC

SECRET STASH comics' hidden gems

MY MONKEY'S NAME IS JENNIFER

TRANSVESTITE NINJAS, RAPPING PIRATES AND ONE ANGRY MONKEY STAR IN ONE OF COMICS' STRANGEST BOOKS



THE DIRT Jennifer is one cantankerous primate—and why not? She has to wear a dress, gets beaten up on a regular basis and she's not even a she! Jennifer's a male monkey and the star of Ken Knudtsen's *My Monkey's Name Is Jennifer*, a six-part mini-series from Slave Labor Graphics.

DOYA LIKE? If you're a fan of the obscure humor of Tony Millionaire or R. Crumb, then Jennifer is right up your alley.

DIDJA KNOW? Despite being one of the most bizarre humor series to ever hit comic shops, series creator Knudtsen got the inspiration for Jennifer from a very common source. "The Simpsons episode with the helper monkey was on, and it hit me that monkeys are funny, but what if it was an angry monkey?" recounts Knudtsen. "Then I built around that. 'Why would the monkey be angry?' I'll put him in a dress."

Close your eyes and imagine for a moment that you're a pet monkey named Jennifer

For starters, you're a monkey—an animal with no other purpose on this planet but to be an object of ridicule and amusement for the human race. Add in the fact that, despite being the proud owner of a Y chromosome, your pre-teen female owner calls you Jennifer, finds sadistic glee in dressing you up in frilly little dresses and throws make-believe tea parties in your honor. Finally, when the slightest thing goes wrong, the parents of your owner beat you senseless and yell, "Bad monkey!"

Welcome to the hellish world of Jennifer, the simian star of Ken Knudtsen's *My Monkey's Name Is Jennifer*, a mini-series from Slave Labor Graphics. While a story that mixes monkeys, verse-obsessed pirates, transvestite ninjas and a skeletal guardian angel may seem like a high concept, Knudtsen illustrates the story in terms that even a monkey with a severe identity crisis could understand.

"The monkey's crazy because the girl treats him like a little sister," laughs Knudtsen. "They have tea parties with stuffed animals, and the parents are always around hitting him when he goes crazy."

With that simple description alone, I was sold on *Jennifer* without even reading the first issue. Let's face it, there's nothing funnier than a pissed off monkey in a dress.

In issues #1-#2, Jennifer must save the girl. (Jennifer's owner is simply known as "the girl" from a gang of ridiculous terrorists who Jennifer angrily refers to as the "bad men." The monkey soon enlists the help of a few oddball characters, the girl's guardian angel, who resembles the Grim Reaper in a "Reservoir Dogs"-type suit, and the Connecticut Undulating Ninja Transvestites (the name pretty much says it all). While the action is rapidly paced and the bad men are easily subdued, Jennifer's anger is barely contained. All the while he thinks, "Say goodbye to your fleshy testicles," "Maybe their heads will explode," and other random expletives.

The little girl gets kidnapped and Jennifer feels as though he has to save her because he doesn't want to get beat anymore," Knudtsen deadpans. "He figures if he

MONKEY SHINES Luckily for Jennifer, he's not always confined to girly dresses—check out his "Goonies"-ish adventure gear!

comes home without the girl, the parents are gonna go nuts."

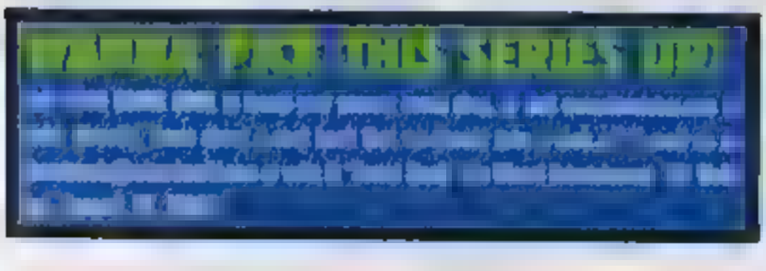
The remainder of the mini-series (issue #3 is currently available and offers a great jumping-on point)—which Knudtsen describes as "kind of like a 'Muppet Babies' thing"—finds Jennifer and his owner trapped on a ship packed with whack-MC pirates. While Jennifer has trouble distinguishing whether or not the scenario is a dream, he once again feels responsible for the girl's protection. As usual, the self-aware simian rants to himself and spits venom on par with a Garth Ennis character.

While it's difficult to compare Knudtsen to other contemporary writers, it's safe to say he's an off-the-wall comic prodigy. Other than the '60s "Batman" TV show, where else can you find a gang of bumbling mooks fighting a team of men in suggestive clothing?

Likewise, it's just as difficult to relate Knudtsen's art to any current penciler, but he's got a style that's quite unique and imaginative. He manages to convey so much anger in Jennifer's face, but in a way that can only be considered artistic. Meanwhile, the current pirate storyarc harkens back to the classic comic strips such as Milton Caniff's *Terry and the Pirates*.

Sure, *Jennifer* sounds like one of the most bizarre comics on the stands (and trust me—it is), but it's definitely worth a read. Especially if you're a fan of off-the-wall humor...or just enjoy witnessing the wrath of an angry monkey.

THE LAST WORD Angry monkeys, ninja transvestites, pirates with poor MC skills—it's clear *My Monkey's Name Is Jennifer* is unlike anything else on the stands today. Yet the unique premise, oddball humor and, well, the monkey make *Jennifer* a must-read. ■ **CASEY SELLAS**



HIDE N' SEEK

Does *My Monkey's Name is Jennifer* sound intriguing? Then why not check out these other titles? All items ship in August unless otherwise noted.

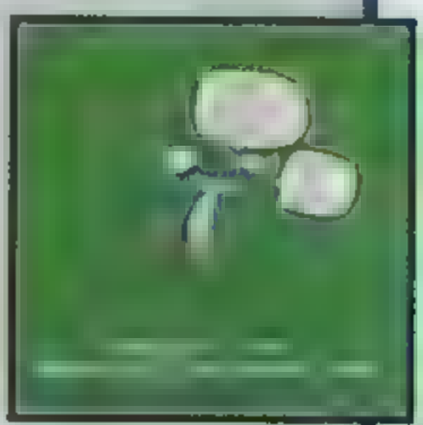
LORI LOVECRAFT RETURNS

Everyone knows Hollywood is chock full'a untalented B-Movie actresses and demons, but none of them are like Lori Lovecraft.

Beginning this month, Lori makes her triumphant return to comics with an all-new, two-issue mini-series titled *Lori Lovecraft: Into the Past*. A healthy mixture of horror and Hollywood satire, *Into the Past* presents a grand Lori adventure as she takes on the demonic legions of hell that have taken over the entertainment industry, all while exploring the mystical powers granted to her by the Necronomicon.

While fans of the original 1975 *Lori Lovecraft* series won't be disappointed with the new mini-series, original creators Mike Vosburg and Pete Ventrella plan on updating Lori for the 21st century with new characters and villains. So if you're a fan of horror tales with sex appeal, pick up *Lori Lovecraft: Into the Past* for $3.95. Visit **www.vozart.com** for more info.

FANCY T-SHIRT



James Kochalka's filthy frog friend Fancy Froglin can now be seen on T-shirts everywhere, only wearing pants and not showing off his nether-regions. Proceeds from the shirt's sales will benefit the Comic Book Legal Defense Fund. Get your own Fancy Froglin T for $20. Visit **www.cbldf.org** for info.

TO INFINITY AND BEYOND!

Remember the name Craig F. Weich...he could very well be the future of comics.

Weich, president of Beyond Comics, plans to release his two flagship titles, *Civilian Justice* and *Ravedactyl (Project: Evolution)* later this year. *Civilian Justice*, which Weich describes as "Captain America for our war," follows the adventures of an average joe who takes up the mantle of freedom against terrorism. A percentage of the proceeds earned from the book will go to the 9/11 recovery benefits. Meanwhile, Weich has chosen to keep *Ravedactyl* shrouded in secrecy, but you can check out a trailer at the Beyond Comics website.

In addition to these properties, Weich has plans for two full-length feature films that will tie into the comic projects, starring rapper Coolio and David Prowse (*Star Wars*).

Check out Beyond Comics at **www.beyondcomics.tv** for lots of cool stuff ■ **JOHN R. LACEY**

BURIED TREASURE

Oldest Ditko cover discovered

Spider-Man co-creator Steve Ditko's original art has proved as elusive as the notoriously press-shy artist himself ...until now

Original art dealer Spencer Beck recently unearthed a treasure trove of Silver Age artwork, including (among other pieces) the John Romita Sr.-penciled cover to *Captain America* #114, a Jack Kirby splash page from *Thor* #158 and, of the most significance, the original cover art for *Amazing Spider-Man* #11 and #28, both illustrated by Ditko

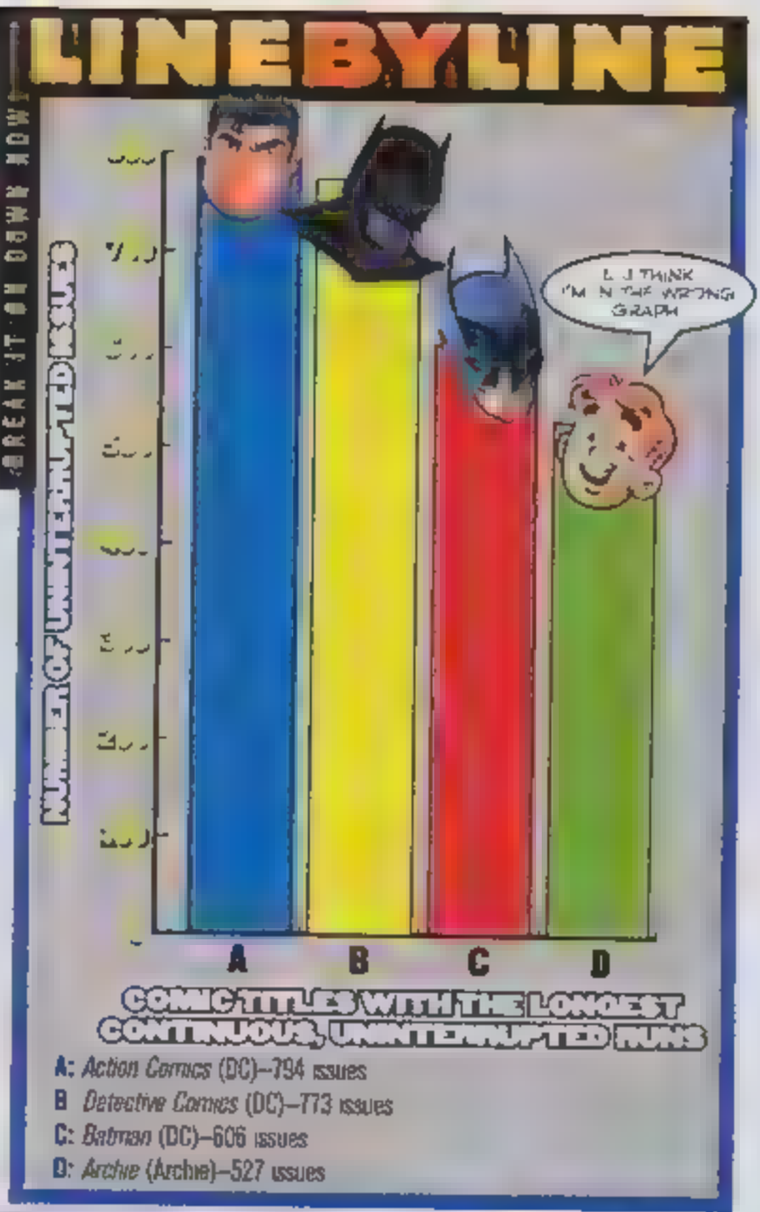
"The *Amazing Spider-Man* #11 is the real historical find," Beck revealed "It's the oldest known cover done by Ditko still in existence. Until it was found, no dealer could confirm the existence of a cover earlier than #25."

The *Amazing* #11 and #28 cover pieces are bonafide hot commodities since original Ditko artwork is virtually non-existent on the market

"You hear stories from people saying, 'Oh, I saw one Ditko cover once. I heard it's in Europe now,'" said renowned art collector Dave Mandel. "But that's just hearsay. Now you know some of this survived. To actually have the *Amazing* #11 cover with a great shot of Spidey and the second appearance of Dr. Octopus is just incredible. This is like finding the King Tut's tomb of comics."

Beck remains undecided about which market he'll pursue to sell his compiled findings. "My guess is that they're going to end up on eBay," said Beck. "It'll allow us to reach a larger audience of prospective buyers." For more info on where and when the pieces will sell, check out **www.theartistschoice.com.** ■ **CAITLIN MORIARITY**

LINE BY LINE



COMIC TITLES WITH THE LONGEST CONTINUOUS, UNINTERRUPTED RUNS

A: *Action Comics* (DC)–794 issues
B *Detective Comics* (DC)–773 issues
C: *Batman* (DC)–606 issues
D: *Archie* (Archie)–527 issues

UPS & DOWNS

MOVERS AND SHAKERS IN THE INDUSTRY

MARVEL SUPERHEROES Marvel's non-mutant core books are picking up steam! Hot Spider-Man books are a given thanks to the movie and *Incredible Hulk* has been huge for months, but recent issues of *Captain America*, *Iron Man*, *Daredevil* and *Thor* have all seen strong showings as of late. Plus, *Avengers* and *Fantastic Four* both welcome fan-favorite new creative teams this month!

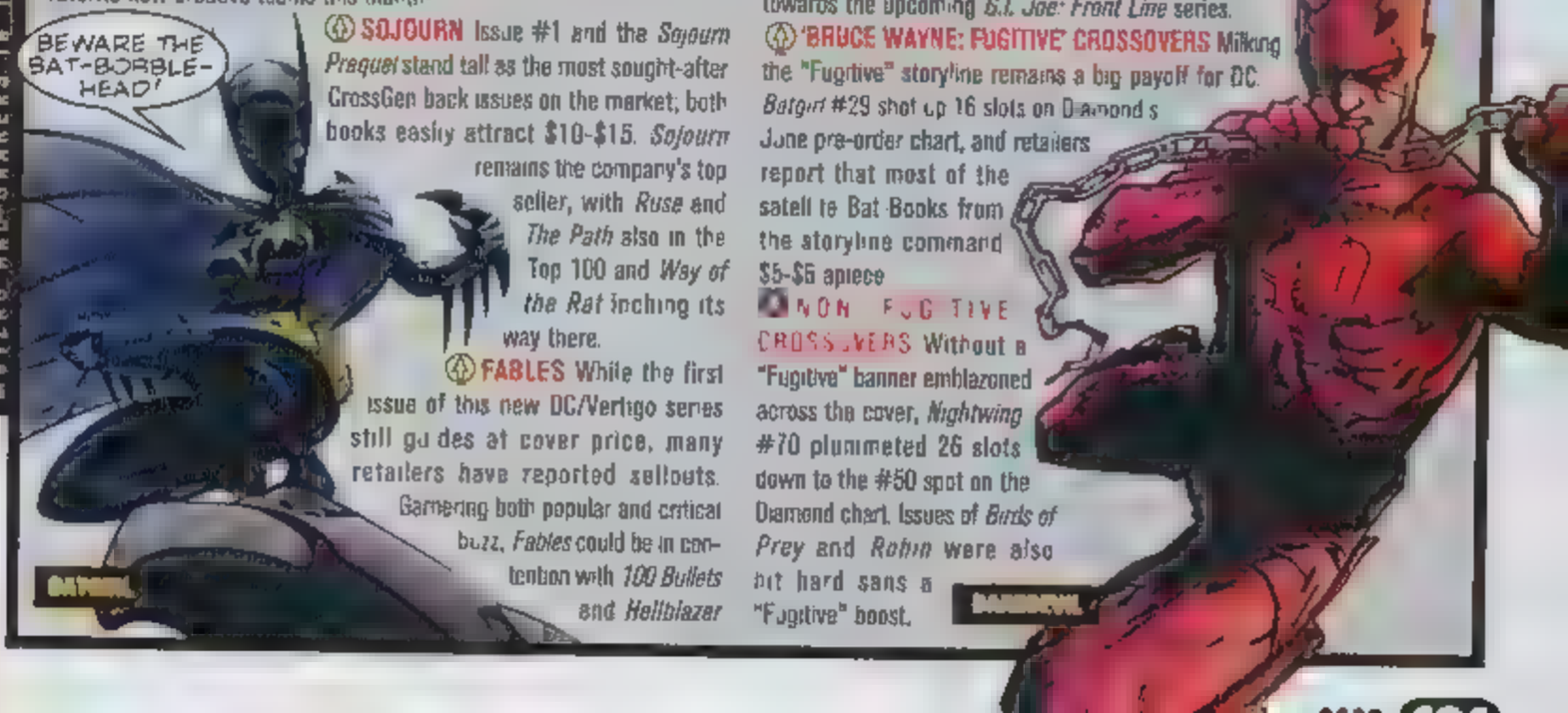
SOJOURN Issue #1 and the *Sojourn Prequel* stand tall as the most sought-after CrossGen back issues on the market; both books easily attract $10-$15. *Sojourn* remains the company's top seller, with *Ruse* and *The Path* also in the Top 100 and *Way of the Rat* inching its way there.

FABLES While the first issue of this new DC/Vertigo series still gu des at cover price, many retailers have reported sellouts. Garnering both popular and critical buzz, *Fables* could be in contention with *100 Bullets* and *Hellblazer* as the flagship Vertigo title

G.I. JOE The back-market heat once associated with the Image/Devil's Due series has begun to lose momentum like a Skystriker low on fuel. While issues #1 and #2 are still traded heavily, later issues are collecting dust. It appears that interest has moved more towards the upcoming *G.I. Joe: Front Line* series.

'BRUCE WAYNE: FUGITIVE' CROSSOVERS Milking the "Fugitive" storyline remains a big payoff for DC. *Batgirl* #29 shot up 16 slots on Diamond's June pre-order chart, and retailers report that most of the satell te Bat-Books from the storyline commend $5-$5 apiece

NON-FUGITIVE CROSSOVERS Without a "Fugitive" banner emblazoned across the cover, *Nightwing* #70 plummeted 26 slots down to the #50 spot on the Diamond chart. Issues of *Birds of Prey* and *Robin* were also hit hard sans a "Fugitive" boost.



HOTTEST BACK ISSUES

HOT 10 comics

***Wizard*, by staying in touch with hundreds of retailers throughout the country, keeps a close eye on the hottest back issues. These are the books ringing the registers this month...**

1 COD: THE BROTHERHOOD #1

WRITER: Chuck Austen & Bruce Jones
ARTIST: David Finch & Art Thibert

Thanks to a media blitz spearheaded by Joe Quesada, fans, collectors and especially curious non-comic readers snatched up copies of Marvel's *The Call of Duty: The Brotherhood* #1. The book, which stars a cast of New York City firefighters ("The Bravest," as we refer to 'em here in New York), has practically sold out nationwide and currently commands as much as $15 online! Despite the hype, *Brotherhood* proves that the greatest heroes don't wear capes or masks. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

2 TRANSFORMERS: G1 #1 Retailer Incentive

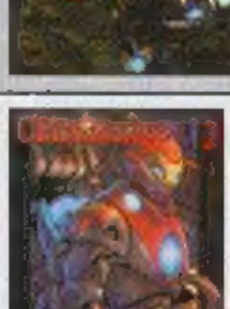
WRITER: Chris Sarracini
ARTIST: Pat Lee & Rob Armstrong

If you thought the holofoil cover variant to *Transformers: G1* #1 was the real collectible humdinger, then your retailer might be holding out on you. Taking a cue from the #3 book on this list and shipping one to every 25 copies, the super-rare Retailer Incentive variant (with a Devastator vs. Superion cover) has become the issue that collectors are clamoring for. Start hoarding your allowance though, as copies of this rare find are currently fetching $100 on the back market. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

3 ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN #1

WRITER: B. Bendis, J. Quesada & B. Jemas
ARTIST: Mark Bagley & Art Thibert

Thanks to a little film called "Spider-Man", there's been a boost in the popularity of this issue's white cover variant. It may say that this jewel's worth $130 in our price guide, but when you toss in a high CGC grade and Internet access, expect it to fetch upwards of $850! This isn't a comic anymore--it's a down payment on a new car! **LAST MONTH: N.R.**



4 ULTIMATES #2

WRITER: Mark Millar
ARTIST: Bryan Hitch & Andrew Currie

The "Terrible Two" curse strikes again! Yup, it's the same old story--retailers ordered a zillion copies of *Ultimates* #1, but pulled back for #2. Naturally, *Ultimates* #2 sold out right off the bat and has become the missing issue in many of our collections. If you find one, will ya pick one up for us? We promise we'll pay you back. **LAST MONTH: 2**

5 INCREDIBLE HULK #34

WRITER: Bruce Jones
ARTIST: John Romita Jr. & Tom Palmer

Talk about legs! The first issue of the Jones/Romita Jr. run on *Hulk* has found a place on the "Hot 10 Comics" list for five straight months, and not once has it dipped below the #5 spot! Add in the fact that *Incredible Hulk* #34 sold out damn near instantly and has hit $22, and we're guessing you Hulk fans kinda like this series, huh? **LAST MONTH: 3**

6 GREEN LANTERN #150

WRITER: Judd Winick
ARTIST: Various

These super-sized milestone issues are always sure to catch fire with collectors and fans. However, when you throw in a cover by Jim Lee, a host of talented upcoming artists, a new Green Lantern costume AND the introduction of a new set of Guardians of the Universe, it then becomes a must-have for your collection. **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

7 DAREDEVIL #32

WRITER: Brian Michael Bendis
ARTIST: Alex Maleev

The creative duo of Bendis and Maleev have delivered one of the best damn Daredevil stories we've read in a long time. In this particular ish, Matt Murdock is outed as Daredevil in every major newspaper in New York City, and if you think that's shocking, wait'll you see what happens at the end of the issue! **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

8 IRON MAN #55

WRITER: Mike Grell
ARTIST: Michael Ryan & Sean Parsons

What would have been issue #400 of ol' Shellhead's regular series (damn "Heroes Reborn"...), *Iron Man* #55 also delivers quite a shock--Tony Stark reveals to the world that he's been Iron Man all along! Throw in that sweet-ass-sweet cover by Kia Asamiya, and this ish is lighting up the back market! **LAST MONTH: N.R.**

9 CAGE #1

WRITER: Brian Azzarello
ARTIST: Richard Corben

If you want Harlem's resident badass, Luke Cage, done right, you sure as hell better get Azzarello and Corben to be the creative team. The MAX standout remains the adult-themed book of the moment, with a current back-issue price tag of $5. And that makes Cage one baaaaad mutha--shut yo' mouth! **LAST MONTH: 4**

10 PETER PARKER: SPIDER-MAN #29

WRITER: Paul Jenkins
ARTIST: Charlie Adlard

Spider-mania is at a fever pitch, and anything related to the summer blockbuster--from toys to Underoos--has become a collector's item. Take *Peter Parker* #29; just because the cover resembles that classic kissy-face scene in the movie, fans started picking this up in droves! **LAST MONTH: 8**

C.B.I.Q.

THE COMIC BOOK INTELLIGENCE QUOTIENT

Cowabunga! Surfing the wave of retro mania with their all-new bi-monthly comic from Mirage Studios, the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles are back and raising shell once again. But how much do you remember about everyone's favorite heroes in a half-shell? Take our TMNT C.B.I.Q., and show us what you got! But beware: Losers who can't pass the test get thrown right in the soup pot!

1. According to Ninja Turtle lore, what NYC-based Marvel superhero shared his origin with the Turtles?

2. The Turtles' archnemesis, the Shredder, is head of the New York City branch of what enigmatic ninja clan?
A) The Hand
B) The Foot
C) The Fist
D) The Crotch

3. What does T.C.R.I. (you know, that group of creepy alien robots with their brains in their stomachs!) stand for?

4. TRUE OR FALSE: In the comics, the Turtles' mutant sensei Splinter was originally a human.

5. What is the weapon of choice that part-time vigilante/full-time psychopath Casey Jones uses to dispense justice with?
A) Shotgun
B) Chainsaw
C) Hockey stick
D) Choo-choo

6. The real name of the [illegible] Four's archenemy [illegible]der is?
[illegible] Saki
[illegible] Yoko Ono
C) Oroku Nagi
D) Hamato Yoshi

7. What WWE superstar played the Super Shredder in the film "Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles II: The Secret of the Ooze," a.k.a. the nail in the Turtles' coffin?
A) Randy "Macho Man" Savage
B) Psycho Sid
C) Kevin Nash
D) Dink, evil midget clown sidekick

8. TMNT co-creator Kevin Eastman is married to what former *Penthouse* Pet, "Heavy Metal" chick and comic book spokesmodel?

MORT OF THE MONTH

ANSWERS: 1. Daredevil. 2. B. 3. Teleny-Cranial Reservoir Interface. 4. False. He was a [illegible] rat until Hamato Yoshi[illegible]. 5. C. 6. B. 7. C. 8. The lovely and talented Julie Strain.

GUESS THE NAME & ORIGIN OF THIS MONTH'S LOSER

A. Edward Blake worked for a special military forces unit doing all sorts of nasty black ops work, but when the wars dried up, he took his hard-hitting tactics back to the criminal underworld, working as the vigilante known as **THE COMEDIAN!**

B. Troubled by mental illness throughout his teen years, Jack Dolan became traumatized once and for all following a tragic circus accident that caused him to adopt the homicidal persona of the killer clown called **CUT-UP!**

C. Rory Bellows trained for years to follow in his father's footsteps as the finest clown under the big top, but when business folded, Bellows used his acrobatic powers and gag weapons to become the master thief with the moniker **THE HARLEQUIN!**

D. The direct descendant of a medieval court jester, Chuck Lane was inspired by his family's past to fight crime as the bell-wearing scourge of New York City's gangsters, **THE JESTER!**

ANSWER: D. The Jester was first appeared in Strange Comics #72.

MORTOMETER

THE HOTSEAT

This Month Featuring:

MIKE TURNER

CO-CREATOR OF WITCHBLADE, CURRENTLY PRODUCING IMAGE/TOP COW'S *FATHOM*

WIZARD: Hey, I hear you chose *Fathom* to be an underwater book because you can't draw feet and it's easy to cover up feet when you're swimming.

TURNER: Who told you that?

Uh...I don't remember.

It's not true. I can draw all kinds of feet. I did a whole page in *Witchblade* with huge feet.

So, you kinda have a foot fetish.

[*Long pause*] No, but I did sell that page to a guy who had one. He looked at it and went, "Ahhhhhhh...ughhhhhhhh!"

Ewwwwww. Let's move on. When was the last time you wanted to kick someone's ass?

It's been awhile. Usually people want to kick my ass. I either buy them a beer or I kick their ass.

Yeah, you're a black belt, right?

Something like that.

Damn, you're mysterious like *the Master.*

Uh-huh.

Speaking of mysteries, if you could have dinner with anyone who would it be?

James Cameron. I think we see things the same way. We like the same kind of ideas.

So, you both like sappy, over-produced, plotless drivel.

What?

Never mind. Who's prettier—you or John Cassaday?

Prettier? The guy who draws *Captain America?*

Yeah. You know you're man-pretty, right, dude?

I don't think anyone's ever put it like that. But John's gorgeous.

You want to have his babies.

Hey!

Okay, okay...You live in L.A. Who's the hottest chick in Hollywood?

Jessica Alba's pretty hot.

Oh, yeah...she's my little Dark Angel. [*Giggle*] So, besides John Cassaday and Jessica Alba, who's your best friend in comics?

[Top Cow owner] Marc Silvestri.

But he's your boss.

So?

I hate my boss.

Are you going to print that?

He doesn't read the magazine.

■ MIKE COTTON

THE RETURN OF THE KING?
JLA
THE OBSIDIAN AGE
THE HUNT FOR AQUAMAN
#69-75
Joe KELLY, Doug MAHNKE & Tom NGUYEN and Yvel GUICHET & Mark PROPST
THE ORIGINAL UNIVERSE
DC COMICS

SHIPPING TWICE A MONTH BEGINNING IN AUGUST